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# ENJOYMENT OF POETRY

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# ENJOYMENT OF POETRY

BY

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# PREFACE AND SUMMARY

THE purpose of this book is to increase enjoyment. That the poetic in every-day perception and conversation should be known for what it is, and not separated from the poetic in literature, is to my mind essential to the full appreciation of either. And that poetry in general should be cut off from those unhealthy associations that a leisure-class decadence has given to the word, is of value to the enterprise of enjoying life.

I have drawn the distinction between the poetic and the practical as it appears in my own experience, with little respect for academic or literary classifications. In this way I believed I should stay closer to my chief purpose; I should also be more likely to contribute to scientific truth.

It seems to me that a study of books must be either science—that is, the chemistry and physics of their make-up, and the psychology of their author and his readers—or else history, an account of the general conditions and consequence of their production. Otherwise it is practically nothing at all. And most of what we call "lit-

erary" comment and criticism is indeed neither science nor history. I hope that my book will promote a tendency away from this kind of exercise.

A misfortune incident to all education is the fact that those who elect to be teachers are scholars. They esteem knowledge not for its use in attaining other values, but as a value in itself; and hence they put an undue emphasis upon what is formal and nice about it, leaving out what is less pleasing to the instinct for classification but more needful to the art of life. This misfortune is especially heavy in the study of literature. Indeed, the very separation of the study of literature from that of the subjects it deals with, suggests the barren and formal character of it. As usually taught for three years to postgraduates in our universities, it is not worth spending three weeks upon. The best lovers of literature know this, and the academic world will some day know it and will cast about for a real science which they may teach to those who are going to read literature to the young. That science will be psychology in its widest sense. For psychology is a knowledge that is general without being merely formal. It will reveal and explain, not the scholastic conventions about literary structure, nor the verbiage of commentators, but the substantial

values that are common to the material of all literature. I hope that my book may add impetus to this change in education.

Perhaps, also, by emphasizing the fact that things are, and continue to be, what the poet calls them, whatever else they may be or be named by the scientist, it will add some strength to that affirmatively sceptical philosophy upon which it is founded.

But these aims are all secondary. The chief purpose is to extend to others the service of a distinction which has made the world more enjoyable to me.

In chapter one I have shown how this distinction first appears in the attitudes of different people, or the same people in different moods, toward their experience—toward actions, things, emotions, images, ideas. I have shown that the poetic attitude prevails in childhood.

In chapter two I have shown how the distinction appears wherever names are newly applied, in the origin and growth of language, in slang, in expletives, in conversation, in books, and in the disputes of metaphysics.

In chapter three I have pointed out the two acts, choice and comparison, which are discoverable in every new application of a name, and dis-

tinguished practical choice and comparison from poetic.

In chapter four I have explained why choice and why comparison assist the poetic impulse, the impulse to realize.

In chapter five I have shown that realization is often more poignant in the absence than in the presence of things.

In chapter six I have explained how choice and comparison appear in pure poetry, which is the verbal realization of things in their absence, and in poetic discourse. I have related the "figures of speech," so called, to the common poetic use of modifiers, they all being examples either of choice or comparison.

In chapter seven I have shown what I believe to be the primitive and basic relation of rhythm to the mood of realization.

In chapters eight, nine, ten, and eleven I have explained in detail how the technique of poetry applies to the realization of distinguishable elements in imagined experience—actions, things, emotions, ideas. I have introduced examples of poetry that has given me the greatest enjoyment, and I have illustrated the application of psychological, instead of rhetorical, concepts to its analysis.

In chapter twelve I have set forth values which

poetry may have, not as a realization of other things, but as a thing to be realized for itself. I have done this briefly, because it contributes little to what is already contained in other books.

In chapter thirteen I have related the knowledge of poetry to the art of enjoying it. I have dwelt separately upon the poetry of experience and that of imagination through language, and I have stated that the best path to the enjoyment of the latter lies through the creation of it.

In chapter fourteen I have given the general principles that I think relate to the creation of rhythmical English.

In chapter fifteen I have praised poetry for its practical value, pointing out both its accidental value as an enhancer of meanings, and the value that pertains to its own essence. I have suggested that the latter will increase in proportion as we draw more perfectly the line between knowledge and mythology, and compel ourselves to resort for exaltation to an enthusiastic welcome of the world as it is or as it may be, and for religion to a consciousness of the final mystery of its being.

## NOTE TO THE NINTH EDITION

For this edition of "Enjoyment of Poetry" I have revised the text; and I have added to it an essay on Ideals of Poetry, which formed the preface of "Colors of Life," a volume of my own poems published by Alfred A. Knopf.

M. E.

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# ENJOYMENT OF POETRY

## CHAPTER I

## POETIC PEOPLE

A SIMPLE experiment will distinguish two types of human nature. Gather a throng of people and pour them into a ferry-boat. By the time the boat has swung into the river you will find that a certain proportion have taken the trouble to climb upstairs, in order to be out on deck and see what is to be seen as they cross over. The rest have settled indoors, to think what they will do upon reaching the other side, or perhaps lose themselves in apathy or tobacco smoke. But leaving out those apathetic, or addicted to a single enjoyment, we may divide all the alert passengers on the boat into two classes—those who are interested in crossing the river, and those who are merely interested in getting across. And we may divide all the people on the earth, or all the moods of people, in the same way. Some of them are chiefly occupied with attaining ends, and some with receiving experiences. The distinction of the two will be more marked when we name the first kind practical, and the second poetic, for common knowledge recognizes that a

person poetic or in a poetic mood is impractical, and a practical person is intolerant of poetry.

We can see the force of this intolerance too, and how deeply it is justified, if we make clear to our minds just what it means to be practical, and what a great thing it is. It means to be controlled in your doings by the consideration of ends yet unattained. The practical man is never distracted by things, or aspects of things, which have no bearing on his purpose, but, ever seizing the significant, he moves with a single mind and a single emotion toward the goal. And even when the goal is achieved you will hardly see him pause to rejoice in it; he is already on his way to another achievement. For that is the irony of his nature. His joy is not in any conquest or destination, but his joy is in going toward it. To which joy he adds the pleasure of being praised as a practical man, and a man who will arrive.

In a more usual sense, perhaps, a practical man is a man occupied with attaining certain ends that people consider important. He must stick pretty close to the business of feeding and preserving life. Nourishment and shelter, money-making, maintaining respectability, and if possible a family—these are the things that give its common meaning to the word "practical." An acute regard for such features of the scenery,

and the universe, as contribute or can be made to contribute to these ends, and a systematic neglect of all other features, are the traits of mind which this word popularly suggests. And it is because of the vital importance of these things to almost all people that the word "practical" is a eulogy, and is able to be so scornful of the word "poetic."

"It is an earnest thing to be alive in this world. With competition, with war, with disease and poverty and oppression, misfortune and death on-coming, who but fools will give serious attention to what is not significant to the business?"

"Yes—but what is the *use* of being alive in the world, if life is so oppressive in its moral character that we must always be busy getting somewhere, and never simply realizing where we are? What were the value of your eternal achieving, if we were not here on our holiday to appreciate, among other things, some of the things you have achieved?"

Thus, if we could discover a purely poetic and a purely practical person, might they reason together. But we can discover nothing so satisfactory to our definitions, and therefore let us conclude the discussion of the difference between them. It has led us to our own end—a clearer understanding of the nature of poetic peo-

ple, and of all people when they are in a poetic mood. They are lovers of the qualities of things. They are not engaged, as the learned say that all life is, in becoming adjusted to an environment, but they are engaged in becoming acquainted with it. They are possessed by the impulse to realize, an impulse as deep, and arbitrary, and unexplained as that "will to live" which lies at the bottom of all the explanations. It seems but the manifestation, indeed, of that will itself in a concrete and positive form. It is a wish to experience life and the world. That is the essence of the poetic temper.[1]

Children are poetic. They love to feel of things. I suppose it is necessary to their preservation that they should be, for by random exercise of their organs of feeling they develop them

[1] There is a poetic attitude to the practical life, and no poet is complete without it. It is expressed in these words of Peter Kropotkin:

"Struggle! To struggle is to live, and the fiercer the struggle the intenser the life."

But it is not that attitude which keeps the majority struggling, or keeps any man incessantly struggling. They are not concerned to receive the experience of struggle, but they are concerned to achieve their ends. This general tendency to achieve, to adjust—a primary impulse of life—is set off against the tendency to receive, to realize—a different and also, I believe, a primary impulse of life. Like all things in the world these impulses are rarely found pure, but they can be analyzed out and isolated . . . purposes of understanding.

and make them fit for their practical function. But that is not the chief reason why they are poetic; the chief reason is that they are not practical. They have not yet felt the necessity, or got addicted to the trick, of formulating a purpose and then achieving it. Therefore this naïve impulse of nature, the impulse toward realization, is free in them. Moreover, it is easy of satisfaction. It is easy for children to taste the qualities of experience, because experience is new, and its qualities are but loosely bound together into what we call "things." Each is concrete, particular, unique, and without an habitual use.

Babies have no thought, we may say, but to feel after and find the world, bringing it so far as possible to their mouths where it becomes poignant. They become absorbed in friendship with the water they bathe in. The crumple noise of paper puts them in ecstasy, and later all smells and sounds, brightness, and color, and form, and motion, delight them. We can see them discover light by putting their hands before their eyes and taking them away quickly, and again, at a later age, discover sound by stopping their ears and opening them again.

Who does not remember in his own childhood testing the flavors of things—of words, perhaps, saying them over and over until he had defeated

his own wish, for they became pulpy and ridiculous in his mouth? Anything which invades the sense like cinnamon, or sorrel, or neat flowers, or birds' eggs, or a nut, or a horn, is an object of peculiar affection. It is customary in books about children to say that they care little for the actual qualities of an object, and are able to deal with it as though it were anything that they choose to imagine. But I think only the positive part of this statement is true. Undoubtedly their imaginations are active in more various directions, and they draw the distinction between the real and the ideal in perception less clearly than grown-up people do. But the most pronounced characteristic of children is that they are perfectly free to feel the intrinsic qualities of things as they merely are. What we call objects are for the most part practically determined co-ordinations of qualities. And what we call the *actual* quality of an object, is usually the quality which indicates its vital use. When we say actual, therefore, we really mean practical. But so far as actuality from the stand-point of the things is concerned, the children come nearer to it, and care more about it, than we do. To us a derby hat is for covering the head, and that is about all it is; but to them it is hard, smooth, hollow, deep, funny, and may be named after the mixing-bowl

and employed accordingly. And so it is with all things. The child loves a gem with its pure and serene ray, as the poet loves it, for its own sake.

Nor is it only such qualities as may be said to give pleasure that he seeks, unless pleasure be defined as seeking, for he wants all experience. He wants all that he can stand. He is exploring the whole world of sense, and not rarely upsets his stomach, and his entire system, in a zest for the reception of sensations that are instinctively abhorred. Two children of our neighborhood will wear to their graves the brand of a red-hot scarf-pin as a testimony to that first love of experience. They did not want torture, I suppose, but they wanted to see what it is to be tortured. And so it was in varying degrees with us all. It seems to me, when I look back, as if we were forever out behind the barn finding out what something or other was "like."

It has been a vast problem for those concerned with æsthetic and other theories, why people love tragedy when they are not in it. But if their theories would only allow that these organisms of ours, which have been gnashing and struggling together God knows what billions of years for a chance to live, have really an interest in living, there could be no problem. The problem is, seeing this wild zest for life, and life so tragic—the

problem is, why people do not love tragedy when they are in it. And in truth they do. From the pure sweetness of early romantic sorrow to the last bitter comfort of an old man bereft, who mutters to his soul, "This is a part of the full experience of a man!"—from first to last, up to the cannon's mouth and down to the midnight grave, the poetic impulse survives. We love to taste life to the full.

In energetic but idle hours it survives joyfully. And in youth these were the predominant hours. At all times we were ready for exuberant realization. We were not indifferent to the morning. We did not wake at the greeting of a last night's proposition in commerce or knowledge, but at the smile of the sun. The stuff of our thoughts was not sentences and numbers, but grass and apples and brown honey. Such excellent objects parading before our minds in a thousand combinations and colors left us no time to develop these general conclusions with which we are now filled. We could not banish our prairie thoughts from the school-room, though they liked it as little as we, and the hour of recess was the hour of life. And in the hours of life how greedy we were! Every sense was open with indiscriminate material flowing in. Our eyes trained for every seeing, our ears catching the first murmur of a

new experience, we ran after the world in our eagerness, not to learn about it, but to taste the flavor of its being.

"Oh, the wild joys of living! the leaping from rock up to rock,
The strong rending of boughs from the fir-tree, the cool silver shock
Of the plunge in a pool's living water, the hunt of the bear,
And the sultriness showing the lion is couched in his lair.
And the meal, the rich dates yellowed over with gold dust divine,
And the locust-flesh steeped in the pitcher, the full draught of wine,
And the sleep in the dried river-channel where bulrushes tell
That the water was wont to go warbling so softly and well.
How good is man's life, the mere living! how fit to employ
All the heart and the soul and the senses for ever in joy!"

This agility and fervor of realization extends early to the exercise of all the senses. And then as we grow a little older it comes inward, and we tremble to catch our own emotions on the wing. Fear, for instance, is a being of intense fascination, and even so impelling a power as the instinct of self-preservation is suspended by the poetic impulse—suspended in order that its own very nature may be experienced in feeling. Can you not remember the keen edge of a venture into the barn-yard, a tumultuous dash across to the

corn-crib which offered a refuge impregnable to those mild-mannered cows? Anger is a moderate pleasure to most healthy persons, but in youth it is a thing to thirst after and brag of. It is life itself. Mulishness is an engaging state of being. Cruelty and mercy have often the same original charm.

I remember discovering insolence with exactly the same happy spirit of gratification with which I see babies discover light. I was profoundly interested in Nancy Hanks, who had broken the world's record by trotting a mile in 2.04. I believe that I *was* Nancy Hanks most of the time, and anybody who wanted to converse with me or put me in a good-humor would begin upon that topic. But at last I became aware that I could do something quite different from being gratified by all their talk, and I was carried away by the discovery. My opportunity came during supper, at the gracious hands of a maiden aunt:

"Do you know who Nancy Hanks was named after?"

"No," I shouted, "I don't know and I don't care a *darn*—see?"

My memory of the punishment which followed, and how I became aware that there are limits to profitable exploration in such fields, is dim, but of the excited pleasure of the adventure, and

my underlying friendliness toward the old lady throughout, I am quite certain.

They are great days when we first discern these powerful creatures in us, unnamed and meaningless monsters to challenge forth. Ghost-terror, and dizziness and sickness at the sight of blood, are among them. Imagine the mind of a young man who knows that there lies a pile of corpses the other side of a smouldering factory wall, and he both hastens to them and flees away from them, until finally this lust after the intense conquers, and he goes and gazes his fill. Do not call that morbid, but an act of exuberant vitality. For there is high-spiritedness in those that are young, not for sensation only, but for emotion. And this too they carry with them, some more and some less, throughout life. Rancor and magnanimity, lust and romance, rapture and even melancholy—drink them to the dregs, for they are what it is to be.

"No, no! go not to Lethe——"

It is not only things of the sense and body that a child loves for their own sake, but at a certain age he learns to watch with wonder the paintings of his mind. When he is condemned into his crib, and has to face the loss of the whole lovely world in sleep, then this is the last resource. As

long as God lets him he will devote his somnolescent power to sensuous memory or anticipation, or just the circus-antics of grotesque and vivid-colored creatures that dance in before him unbidden, uncreated, unexplained. Even if sometimes he does honestly try to think, he finds that he cannot very long cling to the meaning of his thought, because he is all curious to examine those garments of imagery that it wears.

To most adults, I suppose, it is a bare mechanical or rational process to count from one to a hundred; but to an alert child it hardly ever is. It is a winding and bending over a plain, over a prairie, a slow climb, a drip-drip, or an odd march of marionettes, or perhaps it is just the queer sound of the words at his ear. At any rate, the engrossing thing is to estimate the unique character of the process and of each member in it. Eight is a jolly fat man. Six is sitting down. Some people say that they never had any of these pleasures, that they have no mind's eye at all. They cannot see six sit down. Let them try to comfort themselves with the idea that they are more scientific than the rest, not having vivid images to confuse their meanings in the serious business of reaching a conclusion. They are like the people on the ferry-boat who stay downstairs where there are few distractions and they can be

perfectly sure to get across. Luckier than they are the people who can enjoy the scenery of speculation, who bring with them out of childhood a clear and spirited fancy.

> "—Great God! I'd rather be
> A Pagan suckled in a creed outworn;
> So might I, standing on this pleasant lea,
> Have glimpses that would make me less forlorn;
> Have sight of Proteus rising from the sea;
> Or hear old Triton blow his wreathèd horn."

The final appearance of the poetic impulse, its intellectual appearance, is also at its height in youth. It is well known that at a certain period, if they are healthy and have a little self-dependence, young persons fall in love with all kinds of unusual ideas. They come forward with an amazing belief, a wise or foolish theory, which they attach to for its own sake, and not out of regard for its practical or real consequence. They take a taste of Atheism, Anarchism, Asceticism, Hindoo Philosophy, Pessimism, Christianity, or anything that offers a good flavor of radical faith. This is only the same zest for experience. And it will need but a glance at life and literature to prove that such attachment to ideas, with small regard for their meaning in conduct, is not confined to the young. It is a poetic pleasure that people bring with them perhaps farther than any

of the others. For most of these pleasures, and especially the more simple and innocent, they soon leave behind, as though it were somehow unworthy to be childlike and love things for their own sake.

We have a superstition prevailing in our homes that the first thing to do upon the appearance of a child, is to bring it up. And we see children brought up in the utmost haste by persons who have purchased their own maturity at a cost of all native and fresh joy in anything available. But could we only realize how far the youthful pleasure in every poignant realization is above the accidents of fortune, we should take as great pains to preserve that, as to erect the man in our offspring. We should ourselves long to be born again, and maintain for the future a more equable union of the practical and poetic in our character.

That such a union is attainable, the lives of the greatest show. It is possible to keep throughout a life not wholly disordered, or idle, or cast loose from the general drift of achievement, a spirit fresh to the world. The thought brings us back to Æschylus, a man of heroic proportions who achieved, in an age of turmoil and war, a life filled wonderfully with realizations that were final, the fruit of evolution, and yet not wanting the excellence of great action directed toward a fur-

ther end. With the participation of that poetic hero in the campaign of defence against the Persians, and in the battles of Salamis and Marathon, it seems as if Nature had indeed achieved her aim. There experience was at its height, but purpose was unshaken. The little library and piazza poets and esteemers of poetry in these days of art, will do well to remember the great Greek, who died the most renowned literary genius of his age but had carved upon his proud tomb only this boast, that "The grove of Marathon could bear witness to his good soldierhood, and the long-haired Mede who felt it."

It would be foolish indeed to question whether or not the poetic are capable of purposeful achievement, and the practical capable of intense experience, for we are all, except those lost in apathy, in some degree both poetic and practical. But the example of the hero proves that it is possible for a man, who can think clearly and command the differences that lie within him, to be both poetic and practical in a high degree.

If we could but free our minds from a contamination with certain modern people who teach themselves that they are presided over by a pretty demon called an Artistic Temperament, we should not only cease cherishing by suggestion the tickle-brain condition into which they decay,

but we should have for ourselves a sounder estimate of the place and dignity of the poetic. It is not an attribute of special, exotic, or disordered types, but a universal quality of our nature. No live man is without an arbitrary passion for some experience. Indeed, the defect of many of those most scornful of poetry is not that they are strong in the practical life, but that the attachment to some single state of being has got the better of them. There are fifty thousand morphine-takers in Paris, and all over the face of the earth how many million chewers, and breathers, and swallowers of what, far from being of practical value, is both costly and deleterious, bearing unconscious witness to the poetry of human nature.

The greatly poetic differ from them only in the healthy variety of their loves, prevailing everywhere and always. They are those who live variously as well as vividly in the present. This alone distinguishes them from the millions. This alone distinguishes them from all those excluded by our experiment at the beginning, who confine their enjoyment to smoke while they are crossing the river. They are not without realization. But it is only the childlike and the poetic who make the innumerable intimate acquaintances that are to be made, who welcome all living

qualities and perfect them, and finally, perhaps, in a supreme moment of morning sunshine and mist over the city, realize what we may call the essence of crossing a ferry. Their breast thrills, and their eyes drink with rapture the million moving and dancing details of that pageant of life——

"—the white sails of schooners and sloops,—the ships at anchor,
The sailors at work in the rigging, or out astride the spars,
The round masts, the swinging motion of the hulls, the slender serpentine pennants,
The large and small steamers in motion, the pilots in their pilot-houses,
The white wake left by the passage, the quick tremulous whirl of the wheels,
The flags of all nations, the falling of them at sunset,
The scallop-edged waves in the twilight, the ladled cups, the frolicsome crests and glistening,
The stretch afar growing dimmer and dimmer, the gray walls of the granite storehouses by the docks,
On the river the shadowy group, the big steam-tug closely flank'd on each side by the barges—the hay-boat, the belated lighter,
On the neighboring shore, the fires from the foundry chimneys burning high and glaringly into the night,
Casting their flickering of black, contrasted with wild red and yellow light, over the tops of houses, and down into the clefts of streets."

## CHAPTER II

## NAMES PRACTICAL AND POETIC

It is not in words that the distinction of the poetic from the practical begins. It lies not in books but in the protoplasm. And no doubt, if we knew enough, we need not begin even with people, but we could trace this cleavage of two motives back into the very birth of alertness in matter, and there see the one current scorning the other as to-day. For poetry is an attitude of the body. Both anteceding and transcending speech or idea, it is a way of experiencing realities.

And yet the realities that men experience, are in their nature very much determined by words; their names are a part of them. And this it is important for those who estimate poetry to understand. It is important for them to understand the nature of what we call "things"—that they are all, as we perceive them, unions of an external impression with something that memory contributes. A mere glimmer of flame through the air, for instance, and we have an *oriole flying;* an odd-shaped parallelogram with a white blotch upon it, and we perceive the *polished, square surface* of

a *table*. Stand too near an oil painting and you can see how few daubs are required, so they be the right ones, to present to us an entire panorama of external reality. Nature herself presents, at any one time, little more than those same few daubs, and her whole triumphal evolution would be to us only a rank flux and confusion of fragmentary qualities if we did not perpetually amplify her intimations, and respond to them as things. Perhaps no one ever saw a farm, or a country, but a farm or a country can be both perceived and dealt with if the mind is active.

Yet either to perceive it or deal with it, without a name, is not easy. Names are a vital part of the contribution that memory makes to things. They determine and carry with them all the rest —the imagery, the mood, the attitude, and activity. The right word is magic; it evokes for us out of the eternal fog whatever object is potential there, and puts us face to face in direct current of communication with it. It does this as no other power under the sun can do it. Is it not a question whether there could really be such a thing as a country until after there was a word for it? Take off the name, and I am not sure but the whole British Empire—that vast world-power—would vanish like a speculation, and you would have merely a number of people living some

here and some there. Annihilate the word "love," and you would alter for many the quality of the very fabric of their lives. Such is the importance of names; they are close constituents of real things.

And every real thing has, or may have, two different kinds of names. It may have names which indicate a suitable adjustment to it, and names which engender a strong realization of it. The practical are always seeking the former names, and the poetic are always seeking the latter, and the distinction between them is eternal. It is rooted in the origin of tongues, and it branches in the highest apprehensions of metaphysics. Wherever a name is newly applied, we may ask and answer the question, is it applied with a predominantly poetic or a predominantly practical intent? [1]

Doubtless we have in ourselves experienced something like the original birth of a poetic word.

[1] It will be understood that by names I do not mean single terms only, much less nouns, *but any word or group of words identified with an experience.* Only five of the nine parts of speech—nouns, pronouns, verbs, adjectives, adverbs—can alone be called names of things. The rest are things in their own right, mental acts which serve in the creation or manipulation of names. *Horse* is a name; so also is *trot;* so also is *this horse that trots as though his fore and hind quarters were operated separately.* But *that* and *as though* standing alone are not names.

We first got acquainted with cows by mooing, and with the wind by howling up his chimney, and sometimes still, when a blue-bottle circles round us on a summer noon, if we have nothing else to do we say "buzz," for no better reason than because he said it. And in some such way as this, thousands of years ago, upon the tongues of idle but appreciative savages, many little words and parts of words must have been born. Other little words are reported to have jumped right out of the mouths of these savages, when they were surprised or shocked by anything. And probably many of these too, when they were afterward applied to the object that produced them, were applied with a poetic intent, an intent to renew that experience for its own sake. But of those words which arose—as it has been held that all speech arose—out of a song or grunt of action in unison, a kind of "yo-he-ho," naming the action first and then extended to the object acted upon, probably the majority were children of a practical necessity.

It is not poetic to extend the name that is part of an act to the object acted upon, because the object is not like the act. I believe that this is why the Teutonic languages retain, in defiance of the dictates of utility, a certain number of "strong verbs," or verbs which change their char-

acter radically by the time they reach the past participle, where they become names of an object. To *kill* is a vivid act, but to die is quite opposite, and therefore the associative flavor of the word *killed* is wrong. It is very weak, and we always want to help it; we want to say "killed *dead*," or something like that. *Shot*, on the contrary, sounds different from *shoot*, and is fit to receive the impact of it; it is a strong participle. The word *break* is intact and active, and *breaked* would be very much the same, but *broken* is in the condition it describes.

These are producings and modellings of the substance of words, but we must follow our distinction forward into another kind of creation—the creation of names by the new application or combination of old words. "Fire-water" is the name that the American Indians invented for whiskey. And it is, when you pause to receive it, a very wonderful and quick metaphor. Yet we can hardly say whether it illustrates better the practical or poetic motive in word-making, whether it was given in prudence or delight. In the name that some Polynesian savages gave to an explorer's watch which curiously pleased them, we have surer signs of a poetic perception. "Moon," they called it, and when they were questioned why, they said that it was "round

and stayed awake all night." But for examples of such poetry in the transfer and recombination of words we need not go beyond what is obvious in our own language to-day, for within its recent history many names have been born, and still older ones retain the quality of their birth. *Buttercup* is a word of this kind. *Blue-eyed grass, golden-rod, fire-bird, dovetail, sky-scraper, ocean greyhound, pinchpenny, rakehell, swashbuckler, spitfire, kill-joy, slipgibbet,* are words of more or less rapt appreciation; while on the other hand *winter squash, Canada fox, ball-and-socket, office building, steamboat, railroad, money-saver, motor-cyclist,* justify themselves only by their utility.

Even the plainest-looking words will sometimes reveal, to one who likes them well enough to look for it, a lucid perception out of which they sprang. Sarcasm is "a tearing of the flesh." And we may contrast it, for our purpose, with *irony,* which means "saying little—saying less than you mean," one conveying an acute experience, the other a practical analysis. *Gymnasium* is "the place of nakedness." *Retort* is "a twisting back." *Enthusiast* is "full of God." *Night* is "death." And *nightingale* is "singer-in-the-night."

Such is the poetry which you find in the dictionary, the unpremeditated art of men for ages dead, whose utterance in a vivid moment rose to

the heights of genius and could not be forgotten. It is the supreme model for all poetry, vital, democratic, inevitable, embodying the native forms under which man has beheld his visible world, and the subtle work of analogy by which he has blended that with the widening panorama of the spirit.

The same process will go on forever. In our own times every little while, out of a body of names which all suffer the flavor of disreputability and are called slang, the language stoops and picks up a gem. "You're a daisy," is an expression peculiarly akin to much of the poetry that already lies hidden in the forms of words. We can look forward to a time when in a changed language the flower may have another name, but still a man of that character will be a daisy, and no one will know why. *Squelch* and *grouch* and *butt in* are words which might, either for practical or poetic reasons, be lifted into good repute. In the dialect of special cliques or professions, thieving, sailing, baseball, journalism, as well as in general slang, new names of both these kinds are continually born. A *hit,* and a *two-base hit,* and a *home run* are simply useful terms; but to *lean against the leather,* to *rap out a two-bagger,* to *zip it to the fence,* are superfluous and poetic expressions.

It is said that only those slang words which fill a vacancy are taken up into reputable discourse, but in reality literature is ever on the watch for terms which are peculiarly poignant or akin to their objects, and ready at any day to exchange for them an equivalent synonym. *Lurid* is a word exactly expressing the character of modern cheap newspapers, but it is not altogether living, and so in the first flush of their realization a new name came to the birth. They were *yellow*. And yet so strange is time, and so eternal is the perfection of a metaphor which is perfect, that if we turn back to the days when the word *lurid* itself was born and when it too joyfully lived, we find in it exactly the same poetry. It is *luridus*, a Latin word for "yellow."

The enduring character of the poetic instinct is further proven by the luxuriance and similarity in all ages of the language of vituperation. Poetry is the art of calling names, and, in the art of calling people bad names, not Homer, nor Shakespeare, who is the master, can excel the folk-lore upon which he builds. For acute realization of the vile qualities of men, and for scenic effects of the same character, we need not turn to our libraries. Though the scenic oath is scant among Anglo-Saxons, the scantness is more than compensated in southern Europe. Imagine a

race which put as much energy of genius into the verbal realization of the tragic or sublime as the Spaniards or Neapolitans do into the nauseous and irreverent—most of our poetry books would have to hide their heads. And as it is, I believe that their authors could better learn their art here—in the language of loose wrath among the unlettered—than anywhere else, unless perhaps in the dictionary of etymology.

Some people think that the poetic are always talking symbolism and endowing the sod with spiritual meaning. They do that, to be sure, because that is a great way to realize the sod and the spirit, but they also do the opposite. They daub the spirit. The most baneful degeneration to which names lend their aid is a poetic one. It is an excessive love of the imaginative realization of what is normally repulsive. Millions of so-called "stories" are current among men and women and children of which the climax is not humor but poetry, a vivid filth. And as the evening progresses you can observe this corruption creep into a group of story-tellers, while their humor expires.

Perhaps the reason why so many people will resent our calling these things, and others, poetic, is that they have got poetry sentimentally attached in their minds to a mysterious conception

of the beautiful. They think that it implies a gush of harmonious numbers upon appropriate occasions, having especial regard to cliffs, maidens, hair, waves, pine-trees, the sea, the moon, and the ethereal significance of each. And the reason for this is that, excepting a few, the most variously poetic people do not write poems. It is usually only those of a certain romantic turn who care to separate names from their objects, and round them into the lyrical shape, and make of them a new object. But these objects when they are made are called *poems*, and thus the whole meaning of the word *poetic* is influenced by the preference their gentle authors have for such topics. In few minds to-day does the word poetic sit clear of this misfortune. But once learn to apprehend as such the poetic in every-day talk, and you will see that it is unlimited either to any range of objects or to any sweetness in handling them. It is simply the giving to any object, or thought, or event, or feeling, the name that makes its nature shine forth to you.

To call whiskey "fire-water" is poetic, but it is also poetic, although with an admixture of humor, to say that Apollinaris is "the water that tastes like your foot's asleep." Both are true names. And in such lively expressions, words which perhaps never permanently unite with their object,

but are called once or twice and then forgotten forever—in them, poetry is living continually before us.

Imagine that there are two people walking along the beach in leisure where the sea resounds. "It sounds like eternity," says one. "Well," says the other, "it sounds to me more like shovelling coal down a chute." The contrast is perhaps sharp, but it is not extreme, for each has sensed and conveyed to the other in language the intrinsic quality of his experience. The deeper difference lies between them both and the man who, walking by the sea, does not name it for its sound at all, does not pause to receive the sound into his mind, but names it *brine*—water with a three and one-half per cent solution of natural salts which he might precipitate with a distillery and put to a profitable use. He is the practical man.

The conversation of the poetic is acute and exhilarating, waking you to the life and eminence in reality of all things. The conversation of the practical is instructive, interesting, sometimes full of surprise and a feeling of supreme possibility. For in its highest reach the practical application of names is nothing less than the external substance of scientific knowledge.

Those who are engaged in the quest of such knowledge, and who call it Pure Science, and

scorn the application of its results to those purposes recognized in the popular use of the word "practical," will resist the appellation. But, nevertheless, their activity in the laboratory, or in their own minds, comparing, classifying, naming, is always directed toward an end, however arbitrary, which they have set before them, and is subject to the test of their achieving or failing to achieve that end. Wherever it is not mere mythology, science is to some degree practical in the accurate sense of the word. Even in those discursive studies which appear to be but a description of the species that occupy the earth, the classifications are made and the names applied always with a view to conduct, even though that conduct be merely mental. And it is only this that distinguishes their language from the language of the poetic.

Once more, imagine two people walking in leisure, and this time along the roadside. It is summer and the yellow-birds are holding their sprightly revels among the milkweed blossoms there, dancing along before them as they go.

"Regular little *butterflies*, aren't they?" says one.

"Yes," says the other faintly, and then, with emphasis: "It is the *American goldfinch*, you know—a *grosbeak*."

These are the two ways of being, as we say, interested in the birds. They are the two ways of being interested in everything in the world, and calling it by name. But in no other place will you find the opposition of poetic and practical terminology more exquisitely set forth than in the bird-neighbor books and wild-flower guides of modern times. There, side by side, you may read them—on the one line, labels picked from a language whose poetry is dead, and applied by earnest minds to serve the business of intellectual manipulation and accurate reference, and, on the other line, names bestowed in living syllables by the hearts of rural people in happy moments of carefree and vivid experience. Trailing Arbutus, Bouncing Bet, Dragon's Blood, Beggar's Buttons, Nose-bleed, Gay Feather, Heart-o'-the-earth, Ruby-throat, Firetail, Hell Diver, Solitary Vireo, Vesper Sparrow—these are the words for those who care but to feel and celebrate the qualities of things.

And in the lavish persistence, and in the truth, of these meadow names, holding their own against so much Latin, there is a lesson in humility for all science. It is about twenty-three hundred years now that scientific people have been constructing a world in systematic opposition to the world of the poetic, until in certain communities things

have become exceedingly strained, and communication between those living in the two worlds is wellnigh impossible. Here is so simple and commonly regarded an object as water, for instance. The scientific have named it "$H_2O$." The poetic name it "wet"—not to say "babbling," "wild," and so forth. Each professes to name it with regard to its intrinsic and most real and final nature, and hence arises the central problem of modern philosophy, and the great task of modern philosophy—to discover a mode of sociability between the extremes of the poetic and the practical world.

Is the right name of water *wet*, or is it $H_2O$? That is the great argument between them. And only in our own times has it begun to be clear that unto eternity neither side will ever give in, and that the only thing for persons to do who are in a hurry, or wish to be larger than either science or poetry, is to confess that it is probably both. Yet, after acknowledging this, those who came from the poetic side of the argument might be permitted to stipulate that, if there is to be any doubt allowed as to the correctness of either name, that doubt shall cling to the scientific one. For since science arises out of the impulse to alter and achieve, and poetry out of the very love of the actual, there is more danger that science will

build too much intellectual stuff into things, than that poetry will. Science inevitably idealizes; poetry is primarily determined to realize. The poetic name points to the object, the practical name points from the object. And if there were to be a crisis between them, if all feeling and all endeavor were suddenly to cease, and the dispassionate material of each long-suffering reality somehow to move forward and declare itself, I think that the name this one would most surely declare, upon that day of the death of metaphysics, would be "wet." It might even be "babbling," not to say "wild."

One thing is certain, however, and that is that we need not soon anticipate such a day, nor hope for the death of metaphysics. And in the meantime, which is forever, the key and the solution, the only one that mortals will find, of the conflict within them between these two kinds of names, is to decline to regard them as rivals, but, taking their difference to be a difference between two impulses of life, to avail themselves upon the appropriate occasions of each.

"Effulgence of bright essence increate" is a name that John Milton gave to light. He gave it, perhaps, in the pain and ecstasy of vivid remembrance, in blindness. At least he sought with all his power to convey, enriched by intellect,

the naïve sense of the being of light. In the same century a different but equally supreme genius, Isaac Newton, following the Greeks, gave to light the name "corpuscular emission." He gave it in his laboratory, in the mature activity of an intense mind bent upon learning the terms in which the world is to be dealt with. Now, both these high efforts, Milton's as poetry and Newton's as science, may be said to have failed. Milton did not convey a sense of the being of light, fundamentally because light is not similar to the Latin language; and Newton did not learn entirely well to deal with light, because it is not very similar to corpuscles. But does not this make all the more obvious the folly of our becoming exercised over the conflict between them, as though the world were not large enough and time long enough to hold both Milton and Newton, and others who shall in part supersede or excel them both?

Only when the practical usurps the empire of the poetic, or the poetic denies an ultimate sanction to the practical, do they become rivals—rivals for a supremacy that no real names can have. For there is a large democracy in nature. The world itself is not dogmatic. It both lends its support to a number of practical assumptions, and consents to be in some measure what any

poetic mind perceives it. The mind, in truth, does not impose itself upon a world of other things, but is itself a part of things so far as they engender experience. The poetic impulse is a love of that experience for its own sake. Poetic creation begins in us when we marry, with such love, the images of memory to the impressions of sense, and when to this union we set the seal of a vivid and communicable name we are poets in the full and divine sense. We are makers of a world. For if there is any creation in all history, poetic names are creators. And the man who lives his life in apathy or expeditious indifference to them —the world will never attain a full being in that man's experience.

## CHAPTER III

## THE TECHNIQUE OF NAMES

It is to be hoped that this too continuous iteration of "poetic" and "practical" has begot a degree of antagonism in the reader, because now he will need some emotional momentum to carry him through a heavy passage. We cannot fully celebrate the possibilities of poetic names, until we have made clear and easy to our understanding the mental functions that all names in their first application perform. It is just this amount of analytic psychology the lack of which, in literary critics and others who write books about books, is so disastrous to our love of literature. It is the thing that will some day save us from them; therefore let us study and learn it.

Experience is a continuous process of choice and comparison, selecting one thing and correlating that in the mind with another. I believe that choice and comparison are in some degree present every time that any one is really conscious of anything. It is easy to show that choice is always present; you have only to go somewhere, and stand still, and reflect how many

things there are about you which you are not seeing. Existence is too full for you. You see only the things that your tastes and purposes determine, and of these you see sharply only such features as affect those tastes and purposes. Other persons will see other things, and other features of the same things.

Suppose that you are standing by the side of the road, and a horse and wagon jogs by. You see the horse and wagon, and you observe that it is picturesque. The horse is shaggy, a strawberry roan. But suppose that there is a farmer standing beside you, and he sees it too; he observes that the horse is lazy, ewe-necked, pot-bellied, has a ring-bone on the left hind foot, and other features which relate to the purposes of agriculture. How different is your perception from his, though you are looking the same way and standing almost in the same tracks! It might be, indeed, if you chose to look a different way, and if you happened to have that genius for concentrating yourself upon what you do see which is called absent-mindedness—it might be that you would never be aware there was a horse there at all, or so much as the noise of a wagon. Thales of Miletus, the father of philosophy, owes the half of his reputation to the fact that he once walked out into the yard in a state of such rapt examination of the

stars that he fell into his own well, and imparted a kind of ridiculous dignity to the pursuit of scientific knowledge that it has never lost.

To show that comparison or correlation, as well as choice, is present in consciousness, may be a little more difficult. But if we remember that "shaggy" and "picturesque" are ideas which, derived from other horses and other experiences, were stored away in our minds, and that it is now these ideas themselves which step forward and select the features of this horse and join with it to constitute a perception, and that without the ideas no clear perception, and no clear horse, could be—if we remember that, we shall see that comparison is only a little hidden in the very act of choice itself. In *strawberry roan* it is not even hidden, for we have brought out into our memories the very thing with which the horse is compared. He is like a strawberry—in color, at least, something like a decayed strawberry. In *picturesque* he is "like a picture." But in *shaggy* also, he is "like other things that have given us the idea of shagginess." Always the mind is thus fitting materials chosen from the present into patterns which it brings with it out of the past. And this activity when it becomes explicit we call thought, and when it becomes articulate we call it naming things.

Therefore, in every fresh application of a name we can discern two acts: first, the choice of a detail in the thing named, and second, comparison in that detail of the thing named with other things. These two acts are always in a certain sense one, for it is the memory that makes the choice. Naming things is like cutting doughnuts: here is an undifferentiated mass of dough, upon which the cutter, which remembers the character of other doughnuts, descends and makes after that character a definite excerpt. Exactly thus a word descends into a general impression and selects out a clear experience. It selects an experience similar to the ones which it remembers. But since in this process sometimes the act of selecting, and sometimes the act of remembering, is emphasized, we can divide names accordingly into two classes. There are names which predominantly choose, and names which predominantly compare. The words *shaggy* and *lazy*, for example, *choose* a feature of the horse, but they leave those memories with which it is to be compared, undefined. *Pot-bellied* and *strawberry roan*, on the other hand, not only choose the part and the color, but they also declare the comparison to a remembered pot and a remembered strawberry. All names are of one or the other of these two types.

With this much technical wisdom, then—if anything technical can be called wisdom—let us return to our distinction between the poetic name and the practical. We observe that their technique so far is the same; they both of them choose and compare. But practical names choose different features in an object from poetic names, and they compare the object with different memories.

*Poison-flower* is a practical name which chooses; it chooses the feature of its object which is of vital importance to conduct. *Scarlet-berry* is a poetic name for the same plant. *Ruminant,* as naming a lamb, is also practically selective, although its importance is for intellectual more than physical conduct. *Blunt and woolly,* on the other hand, gives you no scientific indication but a feeling of the lamb's being here.

*Undulations* is the name which, since Newton's attempt failed, the scientific have given to light. It is a name which not only chooses from its object features discovered with great labor and ingenuity, but compares that object with another in which the same features are more simple and obvious. It compares light to the motion of waves in a disturbed fluid. It does this in order to enable us to deal with light, and adjust ourselves to it the better. But light may truly be

compared to a great many other things. It may be compared to the high notes of a flute, it may be compared to knowledge, or to the idea of perfection, or to joy. If I call light "the joy of morning," I have a name which compares and correlates two things as well as "undulation," but it does so with a different motive and a different result. It does not enable you to deal with light any better, but it promotes your realization of its intrinsic nature. It is with this aim that poetic names choose and compare.

Homer could never seem to speak of dogs but he would allude to their "white teeth," choosing that sharp feature to generate a sense of their presence. He would never say the sea, but it was "the wine-dark sea," comparing it for intensification with something else so richly luminous. The feature of Hector is "the beamy helm," and the inevitable comparison for Juno is "her ox-like eyes." But we need not go to Homer, nor to any poetry book, or book whatever, to find the world enriched with names. People with this propensity to stimulating choice and comparison, and the gift of speech, are not wanting in any village of the earth to-day. "Ye came over that hill like a greased mouse," was Jerry Chambers's greeting to an automobile party that stopped for a drink of water at his well. And "Ain't this a

singin' mornin'!" is a word from the same source, "You feel as if you was gettin' born!"

Poems did not arise in books, nor in closet ecstasies either, but they arose upon the tongues of vagrants. Souls whose way was to take a wandering taste of all the toils and sorrows and battles and festive delights of the people on the earth, and talk and sing as they went—they were the poets. And they were the teachers too, for in those days there was no sense of the difference between the words of poetry and those of practice. Beautiful unions of a brave attempt at scientific nomenclature with insuppressible poetry looking through occurred commonly then, as they still occur and will always in the language of childhood.

Children are often intolerant of poetry in books, because they have it in the reality. They need no literary assistance in getting acquainted with the live qualities of objects, or endowing them with their true names. Their minds are like skies full of floating imagery, and with this they evoke the inmost essences out of common things, discovering kinships in nature incredible to science and intolerable to common sense.

The toast is a "zebra."

"Nothing with a tail" is a snake.

The cat purring is a "bumblecat."

The white eggs in the incubator have "blossomed."

But education soon robs them of this quaintness. They are taught that they must get understanding, they must not linger and behold. After education has thus reduced them, however, and taken away their many-colored world, they will often recall with pathetic pleasure a few of the phrases that fell from them in those lost days of contact with things as they are. In the same way we recall the names that were bestowed when all the world was young, and men devoted to science itself had not lost a sense of those first-hand realities whose enrichment will ultimately give to science the only sanction that it can have. Heracleitus the Dark, the greatest of the Greeks who first devised momentous new words for the world —imperious and passionate genius in the childhood of thought—he knew the world both as it lives and as it may be dealt with, nor ever clearly distinguished them, but his science is poetry and his poetry is science, carrying both conviction and fire of reality into the hearts of men to the end of time.

What shall be the true name of the soul? he asks himself. The soul is Flame! That is the living principle, the poignant instant of all nature, union of change and constancy, both ter-

rible and beautiful, and, like thought, supremely real. Not only a stirring epithet is this, to wake you into poetry and life; it is also a vital union of two things upon which the integrity of his science and his working faith depends. You must be temperate, he says, because of this flame substance that illumines you; you must be temperate especially in drink—keep dry within. "A dry soul is the wisest."

Such writings are no more. We are grown up and sophisticated, and we have acquired the knowledge of science and poetry. We call these noble perceptions "mere figures of speech"; by which we mean, or ought to mean, that they create unions which, although contributing to the wealth of immediate experience, cannot to any extent be acted upon. Our ideal in maturity is not to confuse with them the unions which indicate conduct, nor ever to mistake the one kind of speaking for the other.

In the pursuit of practical knowledge we apply names which select in an experience the details that are *important*, whether for our special purpose or for general human purposes; and we unite that experience through such names with other experiences that are familiar and toward which we have an established attitude or reaction. The purpose of it all is adjustment. In the pursuit

of poetic expression we apply names which select in an experience details which are *salient*, offering a good focus for the receptive attention, and we unite that experience through such names with other experiences which are surprising or stimulating, which give pause and alertness to the mind. The purpose of this is realization.

## CHAPTER IV

## THE TECHNIQUE OF POETIC NAMES

Terms are commonly supposed to perform the two functions of indicating things and suggesting their significance in human economy. But besides indicating things, and without relating them at all to human economy, they continually perform this third function of enriching the very experience of the things. Until this is understood, the natural origin of poetry will not be understood. We add the names to the things in order to enhance our participation in their being. Here is the expression, from a nature utterly poetic, of the state of mind which such a use of names fulfils:

"When I am in a room with people, if I ever am free from speculating upon the creations of my own brain, then not myself goes home to myself, but the identity of every one in the room begins to press upon me [sc] that I am in a very little time annihilated. Not only among men; it would be the same in a nursery of children."

". . . if a sparrow come before my window, I

take part in its existence, and pick about the gravel." [1]

It is marvellous to know that mere words, with their little acts of selecting and comparing, could contribute anything to vivify the experience of one so sensitive to reality. Yet it is true that he could hardly look upon a thing he loved without longing for the poetic name and searching it out, whether in the language of others or in his own mind. It is marvellous, indeed, because words are such tiny dry bits of things compared with the great flush objects that the world is full of. And yet if we remember how intimate and strong a part these little words have played in the very making of those objects what they are in our experience, we shall understand how it is that the poetic love them. They love the appropriate name—whether it be a name that selects or a name that compares—because through it they are able in a way to encompass with consciousness the object to which it is applied.

As for the first kind, the selective poetic name, its value for this purpose is simple to understand. It guides the attention to a focus. And this service, though it may seem slight in the proposal, is in fact very great, and for the majority indis-

[1] Quoted from letters of John Keats. W. M. Rossetti's "Life," pp. 154–155.

pensable to the acute realization of anything. Even to that lucky few who are by nature awake when their eyes are open, the living word is no superfluity. He who can speak it, who can sometimes catch the humor of their sensibility and crystallize it upon a point, is as dear to them as he is tedious who can neither select a focus nor remain silent, but spreads adjectives all over the face of nature.

It is difficult to exemplify this gift, because in life the applicability of the choicest name is so often transient and specific. Some old white horse may look exactly "as if he had been used to scratch matches on," but this would be one out of a million white horses. Certain water-weeds in a swift stream may be called "yearning," but not so all water-weeds in all streams. Perhaps you have heard some one speak of the "sucking utterance" of a person, or the "dancing" of a voice, or the "shadowy haste" of a gray cat, and while the suitability of the word at the moment was so great as to make a little crisis in experience, it could hardly be reproduced after the moment was gone.

And yet poetic words which are generally, or again and again, applicable, abide in the memories of some people, and come out at the appropriate times to help them see. How many there must

be wandering in the world who can never look at minnows in a brook but they see them stay "their *wavy* bodies 'gainst the streams," or listen to the gray flies but they hear them wind their "*sultry* horn." Doubtless there is a special passion for the word in some, and others just as poetic are less articulate in their modes of realization. But the average man is so deeply social that some part of the machinery of communication is present in his simplest perception. The more alive he is, the more likely is a word hovering near his lips.

"Million-footed Manhattan" is not the name to guide you in making your way to the metropolis, but if it chances to echo perfectly in your mind, it gives a gift to the journey.

"Million-footed Manhattan, unpent, descends to her pavements."

So of the minnows—when you watch them now, those "wavy" bodies, and—

"How they ever wrestle
With their own sweet delight, and ever nestle
Their silver bellies on the pebbly sand"—

you know them as they existed for one with the supreme gift of realization. You know them more intimately, and you like them better.

"Here are sweet-peas," he said, "on tip-toe for a flight"—a phrase which will give grace, better

than water, to your garden. For words make the world grow—not, I think, because they express a feeling, for that means that they relieve you of it, but because they give to the feeling locality and distinct body. It comes down like dew out of the general air and alights here in a bright drop.

Even without a word, it is thus that we make what we love our own. Notice how specific you become in the presence of a loved object, and how all your tenderness or your delight seems to distil itself and hang upon a certain motion of that object, or a certain pencilling, or shining glance, or shadow. It is no strange, ancient, or bookish trick to greet things with epithets; it is the way the mind always welcomes an experience. And the more hot and electric its passion for that experience, the more it narrows itself to a single item and condenses there the whole ecstasy. In the midst of such passion, to be able to select with perfect intuition or judgment the item that will support and enhance it, is the first half of the poetic gift.

The second half, and that which is more susceptible of cultivation, is the power to evoke into the clear light of thought those specific memories of similar things that hover above every acute perception. The chambers of all minds are

stored with them; they are latent in every common noun, or verb, or adjective, or adverb; so natural to us that in childhood we have trouble to distinguish them from the sensible reality, and yet for most of us in maturity blurred into non-existence by custom and the pressure of affairs. But linger to taste the flavor of any moment in your experience, and you will find vistas opening backward into other experiences which clarify and intensify it. They determine its being.

So essential is this union of two things similar in difference to the very existence, or definition, of human consciousness, that we cannot help believing it describes all consciousness, both in its essence and in its origin. It is the comfortable fortune of a clam to be so limited in sensations that the experience of to-day is almost exactly the same as the experience of yesterday, and may be dealt with in the same manner. Hence almost his whole life must be as unprovoking to him as the little daily act of buttoning and unbuttoning is to us. He is hardly ever roused into awareness of his environment at all. Nothing will rouse him, indeed, but an accident—the discomfort of an unfamiliar sensation. This he will have to attend to, and in some flickering adumbration of genuine perception, decide to which of the old sensations it is most similar, and

respond to it accordingly. His being conscious in that moment depends upon the shock of difference and the need of similarity. It is an act of uniting or identifying two things that are similar although different.

And so is all consciousness, in a profound way of speaking, a uniting of two things that are similar in difference. In the practical or onward course of evolution it was only thus, as a detector of similitude, that consciousness ever arose. And since we are all, by the continuing irony of nature, essentially practical and onward, it is still only thus that consciousness appears in us. As soon as we become genuinely aware of anything, we are already receiving a hint or intimation of its likeness to something else. We are uniting the present with the past; for this function our minds exist.

And therefore it is no great exaggeration to say that one who cannot perform this function, and who never responds to an intimation of similarity, has no mind at all, but belongs among the mollusks or the dead. Only we must not make the mistake of identifying with one who does not respond to any similarity, one whose response is to abhor all those that are poetic, or presented for the sake of consciousness itself. He is not a clam but a practical man. A clam, indeed,

would be more likely, upon the stimulus of some boisterous morning current, to glance round among certain irrelevant sensations of his just to "see what they are like," than would the practical man to contemplate for the wink of an eyelash a poetic similitude. He calls them mere metaphors, and thinks that in so doing he has relegated them to a region as far off as possible from the righteous business of scientific, effective, or "real" identification.

Yet they are exactly the same thing, with the same basis in reality, only free from the domination of prospective conduct and employed for the sake of reality itself. They are correlations proposed, without reference to action, by those who desire consciousness for its own sake. It is as though the poets, seeing that we are all so blindly practical—we are made like tops to go to sleep running unless something upsets us—had determined to rouse us out of this too mechanical condition, and show us the world. And they have discovered an adroit and profound method for accomplishing this. Instead of interrupting our operations and making us wake only to the interruption, they insert into our minds direct the very essence of wakefulness—similarity in difference—and make us wake to anything under the sun that they choose. And that is the expla-

nation, if for so original a fact explanation is possible, of the value to poetic perception of the names which compare.

It is customary in books about rhetoric and prosody to state, as an elucidation of certain figures of speech, that the cultivated mind takes a peculiar delight in apprehending a similarity in difference—a statement which is accepted in silence by the obedient pupil, and harbored in his true heart as one more evidence of the triviality of the cultivated mind and the great foolishness of having one. But we ought to state the case in this way: that mind, so far as we can distinguish it, *is* similarity in difference, it is a state of comparison, and what it takes delight in is the experience of the nature of things. Such a statement, besides approximating the truth, would have the advantage of suggesting to the pupil that his mind is probably a good deal more poetic than that of his cultivated teacher.

Imagine that we hear, or rather we are seized by, a loud and prolonged whistle-blast from across the river. It ends abruptly, and while some are trying in a maundering way to say that the change seemed very sharp, one whom we will call the poet, or the namer, states that "you feel as if you had been over there and got back." Will this be a special delight to the cultivated only, or will

it be the common pleasure of all those who are fond of a sensation and want to get the full savor of it? Whatsoever they were fond of, they would love to have their vague, fumbling, and yet unique, awareness of it suddenly set forth for them articulate, and consummate, and clear, in a climax of the essence of consciousness. And that would be the manifestation not primarily of a love of "similarity," but of a love of the qualities of things. And that is the love that is fed by the utterances of the poet or the child.

He will say that the clouds are *like pop-corn,* and every one will pause and look up at the sky with pleasure. Or he will say that sumach-trees are *like poor people,* or that a pewee's note comes to you through the air *like an arrow.* Or, even in a more conventionalized and common way, he will call a man *goatish,* or *half-baked,* or *off his trolley;* or he will say that he has *butter-fingers,* as they do in base-ball. A boy *gets jumped on* by the teacher; a girl is as *gay as a merry-go-round.* These are all, in their various ways, utterances of the poet among us, increasing our taste of the reality by selective comparison.

He it is that all down the path of human experience has been speaking, and has established such poetry in the heart of language. Nor can we in any way better understand him, and these two

gifts of his, than by turning again to the dictionary and looking into the story of the births of words. *Gymnasium*, "the place of nakedness," was the work of a poet who *chose;* and I think he chose the best, as well as the most striking, feature of his object. *Sarcasm*, "flesh-tearing," was the creation of a poet who not only chose but also compared. He united an experience which is spiritual, with one which is different in being physical but similar in the sheer quality of pain. We said that he might call a man *goatish*, and ages ago in the word *capricious* he has done so. In the word *insult* he has said that he "got jumped on." He has called men *half-baked* also, or at least *cooked too quick* in the word *precocious;* and in the word *delirious* he has called them, not *off their trolley*, but what is the same thing in an earlier state of civilization, *out of their furrow*. More beautifully in a word like *moss-rose* he has made his choice and comparison, and in *ruby-throat*, and *fire-tail*, and all those names of flowers and wild birds, uniting them always with something of invasive individuality, and usually with something beautiful because they are beautiful.

Birds were the first minstrels, and their notes slip like clear joy into the heart. Who has not a "Hail to thee, blithe spirit!" for the least of these aërial beings! Feathered voices, who can thrill

with tiny energy acres of the dull air, and set quivering even in man's heaviest breast vague hopes of an eternal spring. Commonly and of old they have been named with words of subtle discriminating affection, brief perfect utterances, a poetry of the people. And rarest among them all, perhaps, in adoring realism—rarest of all, to one who knows at twilight the place of her wild and tender rhapsody, the swamp-angel.

Crests of nature's loveliness, thus tuned, thus dyed, and thus proportioned, the birds and blossoms have won out of all tribes a treasury of poetic names. And they who have the genius or desire to make poignant through language beings that are less easily or less quickly loved, will not alter the method here simply revealed. They will select in each a certain part or quality, and in a strong revery of the mind unite it with something they remember that is different, but in that high quality the same. They will name it after that. And a world that is sufficiently drab and monotonous to one whose mental indolence is great, or who has sophistication for an ideal, will be rich and wonderful to them.

## CHAPTER V

## IMAGINATIVE REALIZATION

In expectation and revery realization is often more perfect than in the too obdurate presence of things. And with this observation we pass into a domain more commonly called poetic. Yet it should be with regret that we take farewell of reality, in the perception of which poetry arises, and to the developed perception of which it descends again for sanction and for praise. Ideally poetry would always be a vivifying, through the magic of imagery and syllable, of present experience in an adventurous world. But the limitations of time and space and individuality are too tight, and therefore, provided we are healthily rooted in our own now and here, it becomes a thing of joy and benefit to us that we can so vividly remember and imagine, and through the clear medium of poetic language realize in dreams the experience of others.

Yet never let us pass to a consideration of those dreams without a protest against the opinion that makes their unreality the essence or the excellence of them. On the contrary, their es-

sence and their excellence is the contribution which they make of poignancy and breadth and life and celebration, to the actual wherewith each dreamer re-engages. And no more than science can hold sway over the minds of men except as it contributes to their purposes or enlarges them, no more can poetry strongly survive in any individual except as it gives enrichment to the real presence of the world before him.

That this gift of realization can be given in the absence of things often better than in their presence, however melancholy it may be, and again suggesting an irony in nature, is a very manifest truth. Greedy people eat fast instead of slow, because their heart's enjoyment lies always in the next bite after the one that they have in their mouths. If sensual stimulation were really equal to their expectations, I suppose you could hardly induce them to swallow at all. Such hyperæsthetic anticipation is a part of the onward or practical mechanism of nature, and so it may be explained. But reminiscence also is frequently better than experience, as is shown in the wonderfully rich and adventurous past that most dullards are able to enjoy. How dear to our hearts are the scenes of our childhood, and with what exquisite satisfaction we recall the old-fashioned winters that are no more, and the reckless skaters

we used to be in those days. In the city we complete our love of the country and long to greet it again; in the country, some afternoon under a tree, we get the full flavor of our energetic life in the city, and think we but half realized the great drama we were taking part in all winter.

Here we are free from those practical necessities which were ever whipping us forward from one thing to another; we can loiter over the same course with a more discursive enthusiasm. A man in the pressure of affairs bent upon taking life poetically, is like a mule trying to browse while he is driven; his mouthfuls will be hasty and unsatisfying, and at the same time his progress slow. This is one of the reasons why the poetic cultivate their power of reminiscence, and even learn to enjoy the finest savors of an experience after it is past.

Not only do they outwit necessity by this means, however, but they get free from a distraction which disintegrates the experience of anything actual. Actual things are never isolated and framed for our enjoyment as things are in revery. Things in memory are finely focalized and made seizable, unified, and indeed perfected, by the narrowing of their space and time extent, and the omission of whatever opposes or derogates from the feature chosen to be the apex of

our attention to them. For as in the perception of things there is always a favored point, still more in the remembrance. In fact, the mind does not remember things at all, but retains mementos of them—images, we say, of some little, perhaps trivial, detail, about which clings a diffuse sense of their presence. And even as a crucifix or a warmed jewel can sometimes more than console us for the absence of the thing we love best in the world, so can these dyed fragments that the mind collects revive the thrill of our bodies, revive and concentrate it upon themselves, so that they seem to equal or surpass the reality.

Perhaps it will be a fairer explanation, or at least a truer statement, of this superiority of the past, to say that in memory, since there is so little left of the sense-quality of the object, there is more room for emotion in our consciousness of it. And this is true also of anticipation and pure imagination. Our body joins in the apprehension of a thing better when the thing has no body of its own. That is why ghosts are extremely terrible, because they are almost never seen; but when they are seen, if we can believe the reports of those acquainted with them, their presence is not half so effective. And naked bodies are like ghosts in this respect. They are not seen often enough. The carnal appetite is sometimes in-

tolerable, like a scourge, until it comes into the bare presence of its object, when, whether satisfied or not, it becomes quite simple and manageable. So does anger in some people faint at the encounter; and humiliation, and reverence, and love, and wonder appear to die away before a fact, as many proverbs attest.[1] Palpable reality is a kind of sedative, and as such it is often avoided by those who wish to become and remain excited over the qualities of things.

Not only can they realize many things better in their absence, indeed, but they can *enjoy* the realization of more things. Our zeal for being is immensely extended in the thought of it. We call that "adventure" in the retrospect which in the event we called fright; we call that "pathos" which we called pain; and we call that "life" which was sharp agony to be shunned with all our force. The quality of these experiences is recalled and even intensified, but without that organic oppressiveness which drowned the poetic impulse. We are free to love them now with the original love of being.

And this freedom that we have in revery is

[1] Absence makes the heart grow fonder.
No man is a hero to his valet.
Distance lends enchantment.
Familiarity breeds contempt.
A prophet is not without honor save in his own country.

excelled only by the freedom of sympathetic imagination, in which we transcend even these limits of individuality and drink in the experience of others. Here our realization is both fine and utterly catholic. If these others chance to be quite outside the place and time of our living, as usually the poets are, we rejoice in the possession of their utmost pains and passions. That enthusiasm of our childhood for every impress of the existing world that was endurable and accessible to us, is now extended to embrace all things that ever presented themslves to the apprehension of a man. If our stomachs are strong—or our imaginations not too strong—we are attracted to the contemplation in this way of things disgusting and lecherous and full of murder, things that issuing or appearing before us in solids and liquids would sicken us to our entrails. We are attracted to all vivid realization whatsoever, as though we were some kind of blessed gods who, having made the world, were satisfied that it was good in every part.

This opportunity to behold and praise the universe we most of us owe to the power of poetic words. For the faculty of creating realizations is limited and unusual; and it is through the names that others give to their own experience, or to enlargements upon their experience, that

usual persons are enabled to escape from the prison of themselves and get tastes of the general world.

While, therefore, poetic names are valuable to the complete perception of a thing, and still more to the clear memory or expectation of it, to that free realization by imaginative sympathy in which we make all human experience our own they are absolutely essential. And their method in this culminating function is exactly what it is in the simplest apprehension to which they contribute. In naming an imagined thing they select parts or qualities upon which to rest the attention, and then compare that thing with others imagined, similar in those parts or qualities. "O you temples," says the poet, "fairer than lilies, pour'd over by the rising sun!" And to the responsive heart comes a sense or vision of these ancient wonders, more poignant and more memorable, perhaps, than if they had been actually seen and examined, with no poet there to speak the magic syllables.

## CHAPTER VI

## CHOICE AND COMPARISON IN POETRY

Poetic choice is not a choice of things to be realized, remember, for to this end anything may be chosen. But poetic choice is a second choice, within the thing to be realized, of a focus that will intensify the realization. Suppose that we are gazing with a kind of vague affection toward a summer sky; any one by uttering the words "So near!" or "The nearness of it!" can be pleasing to us. These little words precipitate the thing we had in solution. And theirs is the simplest articulate poetry, just that single naming of a quality or part in the whole presence of a thing.

When, however, the thing is absent—when we are not gazing at a summer sky at all, but still the poet wishes us to realize it, he must say more than a single word. He must say enough both to indicate the sky as a whole, and then also the focal part or quality. "The sky so near," he must say, or "The nearness of the sky!" And that is how poetic choice appears in what we may call poetry proper, or imaginative realization through language. Everywhere its words are

doing two things, they are indicating experiences in general and then suggesting specific details.

> "The old pond, aye! and the sound
> Of a frog leaping into the water,"

is the literal translation of a classic poem of Japan, one that they say every Japanese has by heart. I quote it because it reveals the act of poetic choice so simply. The general environment, one very full and rich with beautiful or moving details, is named, and then immediately the most characteristic of these details.

> "The end of autumn, and some rooks
> Are perched upon a withered branch."

> "Aye! New Year's day, with a clear sky,
> And conversation among the sparrows!"

These little utterances—*Hokku* they are called—consisting of seventeen syllables arranged in lines of five, seven, and then five, are the characteristic poetry of Japan. They are without rhyme or reason—just each a single act of poetic choice or comparison, to stand or fall by its own merits. And in most of them apparently the act of choice is accomplished, as in the examples above, by placing a general term first and then the specific details in co-ordination.

The general term does not always stand in the body of the work, but may appear as a title. The following little motion-picture is the winning poem from a public competition in which the general term was proposed by the arbiter. I quote from an English critic:

"The subject has been a 'Spring Breeze,' and to understand the significance of the verse we must remember that in Japan carpenters plane their wood in the open air, and that the curling wood-shaving is the exact shape of the Japanese letter 'no.' Here is the poem:

"'As I walked past the carpenter's, the no-letters chased
me down the lane.'"

Sometimes, however, the realization is all conveyed in a simple declarative sentence as though it were information, and in these cases—as in our own poems, where the impulse to realize is hardly ever isolated—it is a little more difficult to trace the poetic act. Here the chief detail of what we might call a "sea-picture" appears as a solitary statement of fact:

"There, by the crescent moon, the shark
Has hid his head beneath the wave."

More often the chosen detail is subordinated still further, and appears as an adjective, or ad-

verb, or phrase, or clause, modifying the general term.

> "*Without a word of warning*, there
> In th' autumn sky, Mount Fuji stands."

> "How *carefully* begin to bud
> In winter the camellia-trees."

These are rather serene and quiet pictures, where the name of the detail is subsequent and subordinate to the name of the thing. But as the poetic impulse grows intense the detail is more and more elevated, and the general term sinks into subordination, or if it can be somehow understood, it disappears altogether.

This is the tiny threnody of a Japanese mother, Chiyo, at the loss of her child:

> "Where may he have gone off to-day,—
> My dragon-fly hunter?"

She does not say, as the others would:

> "My boy who used to chase dragon-flies."

No, she makes the detail, the dragon-fly chasing, *be* the boy. That is the intenser art.

Here, in a different vein, is even a more incisive etching:

> "A show'r in spring, where an umbrella
> And rain-coat walk along conversing."

In this poem the detail of two covered people walking down the street together is chosen from the general aspect of the shower, and placed in a subordinate phrase; but afterward, within that detail, a more exquisite choice is made, and it is made sharply. There is no mention of the people at all, just those two *parts of them*, the rain-coat and the umbrella, walk along conversing! Such effects are produced by a man who is not afraid to let the poetic impulse dominate him, making his logical import ridiculous.

"They have slain the servants with *the edge* of the sword."

"There came a great wind from the wilderness, and smote *the four corners* of the house."

That is how choice utters itself when realization is intense. And almost throughout our English Bible it is intense. Poetry exists there in the old stories and songs, poetry of the very strongest, without metre, without metaphor, and even where the translator has lost all rhythm of speech. It exists in the choice of practically superfluous but poignant details, which irresistibly invade the mind.

"Woe unto them that devise iniquity,
And *plot evil upon their beds.*"

"Bring out the prisoner from the dungeon,
And *them that sit in darkness* from the prison-house."

That parallelism of phrases, which is the structural feature of Hebrew verse, lets appear the true motive of poetry almost as nakedly as the Japanese Hokku. With them the whole poem is mere realization; with the Hebrews there is a practical intent, there is discourse, but that intent being more than fulfilled in the first line, the second, or the second two, are pure realization of the subject discoursed of. And in them therefore this almost fanatical specification of the minute detail.

"I will not suffer mine eyes to sleep,
Nor mine *eyelids* to slumber."

"Let not them that are mine enemies wrongfully rejoice over me:
Neither let them *wink with the eye* that hate me without a cause."

"He heard my voice out of his temple;
And my cry before him *came into his ears*."

"All they that see me laugh me to scorn:
They *shoot out the lip*——"

It is not really a long step from this flaming poetry to the modern utterances of Walt Whitman, a mystic too, forever hinting at something behind, or beyond, and yet in the depth of his soul loving the inevitable and temporal qualities of things here.

There is no better place to learn the difference between poetry and practical language than in his book, which is a grand mixture of the two. Take those lines beginning "What do you see, Walt Whitman?"—you can mark off whole blocks of them in which, being entirely satisfied with his own vision and himself, he makes no effort to let the reader see, he merely names things with their practical names. And then you can choose other lines and passages of supreme poetry, passages in which, as he himself says, he builds not with words but with materials:

"He puts things in their attitudes,
He puts to-day out of himself with plasticity and love."

Compare the two following sets of lines and you will feel this difference. You will feel the difference between words and things.

(1)

"I see plainly the Himalayas, Chian Shahs, Altays, Ghauts."

"I see the Brazilian vaquero;
I see the Bolivian ascending Mount Sorata."

"You Japanese man or woman! You liver in Madagascar, Ceylon, Sumatra, Borneo!
All you continentals of Asia, Africa, Europe, Australia, indifferent of place!"

(2)

"I see a great round wonder rolling through the air;

. . . . . .

I see the shaded part on one side, where the sleepers are sleeping—and the sunlit part on the other side,
I see the curious silent change of the light and shade."

"I see the battle-fields of the earth—grass grows upon them, and blossoms and corn."

"I see the place of the innocent rich life and hapless fate of the beautiful nocturnal son, the full-limb'd Bacchus."

"You beautiful-bodied Persian, at full speed in the saddle, shooting arrows to the mark!"

"You Austral negro, naked, red, sooty, with protrusive lip, grovelling, seeking your food!"

"You thoughtful Armenian, pondering by some stream of the Euphrates! you peering amid the ruins of Nineveh!"

"You Hottentot with clicking palate! You woolly-hair'd hordes!
You own'd persons dropping sweat-drops or blood-drops!
You human forms with the fathomless ever-impressive countenances of brutes!"

One reason why Walt Whitman, having this gift of conveying realizations to the very highest, mixed them with so much dead stuff, is that he wanted his poetry to be like the world, to "tally nature," as he says, and have passages not beau-

tiful nor conventionally poetic. But this ambition might have been satisfied by introducing in vivid reality things which are not usually introduced. It does not demand that things should be introduced without vivid reality. There are no abstract passages in nature. There are no catalogues of common names. Nature does not exist in classes—blacksmiths, carpenters, oil-works, white-lead works—but exists in the smoke and sweat of individual specimens. Nature does not signify by names but by qualities. And when, like her, the poet enlivens with an act of choice a certain member of his tedious processions, no matter what member it is, we are glad, and loath to depart from it. The energy of such a phrase is contagious, and for a little way on both sides of it the procession moves.

"I see the camel, the wild steed, the bustard, the fat-tail'd sheep, the antelope, and the burrowing wolf."

Observe how that "fat-tail'd" sheep emerges, gives you a sensation, and then lends a bit of his vitality to the whole parade. Leave that out and there is no parade, it is merely a list. But as it is, the camel and the wild steed both prick up their ears to see that fattail coming, and there is a real poetic quality in the whole line.

Turn from this poem, in which as in so much

of his writing Whitman lacks abandon, there is too much of the conscious pulpiteer—turn from it to those poems in which he forgets. The psalm in realization of the death of Abraham Lincoln, the "Song of the Open Road," "Crossing Brooklyn Ferry," "Out of the Cradle Endlessly Rocking"—there where the poet loses himself in the things he names, the poetry is not failing. It is sustained, and moreover it is perfectly simple.

"Mighty Manhattan, with spires, and the sparkling and hurrying tides, and the ships——"

"The most excellent sun, so calm and haughty——"

"The high-spread sky——"

"The huge and thoughtful night——"

"The fragrant cedars and the ghostly pines so still——"

These are all seen in the sorrow of his great poem, just as in life a child first sees them, vividly and wonderfully.

"Day come white or night come black——"

is but the poet's, and the child's, way of saying "day or night." It is the act of poetic choice at its simplest, the salient quality being merely the most obvious of all—too obvious to be named anywhere but in the language of genius.

"Lithe and silent the Hindu appears."

"The friendly and flowing savage."

"The sagging moon."

"Immense and silent moon."

"Over the hoarse surging of the sea."

In these the choice of a quality is more subtle, and in the last one more emphasized also, for the quality begins to be elevated above the thing again. It is not, "Over the sea with its hoarse surge," but

"Over the hoarse surging."

And he might have omitted the sea altogether, as in this line he has omitted the flying:

"And every day the he-bird *to-and-fro*."

These highest degrees of the act of poetic choice, letting the attribute or part supplant entirely the customary name of the thing, have received from scholars some long names—metonymy and synecdoche—and have been classified by them in total separation from the poetic use of adjectives and adverbs and co-ordinate expressions. They have been called "figures of speech." And a figure of speech is defined as an *indirect* way of naming things.

"Spring Shower—an umbrella and rain-coat walk along conversing."

That is metonymy. Tell yourself that it is an "indirect" way of naming things.

"They have slain the servants with the *edge* of the sword."

That is synecdoche, also an "indirect" way of speaking.

The treatment in rhetorical theory of figures of speech, appears to be one of the greatest blunders that an over-spectacled scholarship ever obtruded upon the world. It is due, I believe, to the fact that all discourse was assumed by Aristotle's scholastic successors to be practical in its primary intent; and from the stand-point of a practical intent it *is* indirect to say an umbrella when your logical subject is a man. From the stand-point of a poetic intent, however, an intent to put a man before the eyes *umbrella-foremost*, it is supremely direct. It excels exactly in directness the use of modifiers.

Yet that ancient classification and definition, important or at least interesting to one who studies the mechanics of connected speech, but of the least possible significance in the psychology of poetic inspiration or appreciation, is still forced upon the novice as one of the keys to the enjoyment of poetry. He must learn how lovely it is to be indirect, and when you set out to go somewhere, instead of going there, to back up and

turn round and go somewhere else. This is so difficult for a plain man to learn that I think we may set it down as the chief academic obstacle to the enjoyment of imaginative literature. "Figures of speech"—"metonymy," "synecdoche," and other long-tailed monsters—are what bar the entrance of a simple human into the realm of poetry.

The reason for mentioning only two at this point is that we have now arrived at a suitable place to forget these two. It ought to be possible to obliterate them entirely from the mind, making room in their place for the simple truth that if a speaker's impulse is poetic, words that suggest salient parts or qualities of the things he mentions will stand out over the general names of the things. It is because he seeks to attain and convey to us a sense of the actual existence of those things. And for us things actually exist always with some part or quality thus predominant.

Some who have felt the poetry of the phrases we quoted, will think that it lies rather in the choice of words than in the choice of qualities. We might state, for instance, that the moon is "near the horizon and convex at the bottom" instead of "sagging," that the savage "glides with a continuous grace of movement," instead of

"flowing," and, while indicating the same qualities that the poet did, we should not convey the same realization. And that is entirely true, and it is due to the fact that the act of choice is altogether inseparable from the act of comparison. And every word which comes forth to name an experience in the present, comes forth out of a past in which it has been the name of other experiences. And these it cannot forget. "Convex" compares the moon to what?—to lenses, to spectacles, to circles of paper. What does it remember? It remembers the school-room and the laboratory. And what have they, the school-room and laboratory, that they can bring as an offering to the pure perception of the moon late-risen upon a sorrowful evening? No, they are to be shunned earnestly, and that is why it appears that realization depends as much upon the choice of words as of qualities. It depends upon the comparison of things, and words are the bearers of comparison.

Suppose that we say,

"Day come light, or night come dark,"

then we have nearly eliminated comparison, for *dark* is a word that only remembers other nights, and *light* remembers other days. Therefore, while these words, by their very superfluity, bear wit-

ness to the poetic impulse, the poetry that they generate is very watery indeed. But "black" and "white" have other memories, and much incipient or potential comparison will therefore enrich that day or night in which they choose the quality.

"The flowing savage" is a name which contains choice and comparison in high equilibrium. To one who already knew and loved the fluid motion of an Indian's body, it would be difficult to say which is the more perfect, the instinct that caught it, or the art that could just intimate rivers, melodies—its true companions.

Every line of poetry is pregnant with such latent comparisons; it is a kind of menace. And, just as with rapture the act of choice overtops the meaning, and the customary name is omitted, so also with rapture the act of comparison. The menace is fulfilled. Out of that imminence of vague memories suddenly shoots down into your very speech a concrete reality, and you utter, not the name of your logical subject, but the name of this other that is similar.

"The white *arms* out in the breakers tirelessly tossing."

"With angry moans the fierce old *mother* incessantly moaning."

"I will *toss* the new gladness and roughness among them."

Let this third example remind us that all we have said applies to verbs and adverbs, as well as to nouns and adjectives. "I will *generate with words,* will *stimulate by my presence,* a new gladness and roughness," would be a more practical expression, but *toss* comes forward inevitably and the sentence lives.

When comparison becomes as overt as this, it too is seized upon by the rhetoricians, cut off from the use of poetic modifiers or co-ordinate expressions, and called "metaphor." I am not sure but *the flowing savage* contains a comparison sufficiently manifest to fall under this misfortune. It might be called a "trope," or some other word to signify a shunting off, or blockage, of the general course of business. But I am sure that no essential difference for poetry exists between its use and the use of any rich adjective, such as "lithe," or, upon the other hand, the use of two names and a particle, or copula, to express the comparison between them—"The savage who moves like a stream."

Say that a creature is *pale*—you have some comparison with other pale things. Say that he is *ghastly,* the other things emerge nearer; *ghostly,* still nearer; *ghost-like, ghost-pale,* they are imminent; and *pale as the ghosts of the dead,* they are upon you.

This is an essentially homogeneous list. But every rhetorician will make two abrupt divisions in it. *Pale* and *ghastly* he will let go as "direct," "normal," "literal" names. At *ghostly* he will make a great leap over nothing, and call it a "metaphor"; at *ghost-like* another leap, and call it a "simile." Moreover, if you say, "This creature is like a ghost," he will call it simile; but if you say, "He is a mere ghost," it is metaphor. These distinctions, which have to do with the small points of sentence structure, being pushed forward as something to watch for in poetry, greatly obstruct the natural love of it, and moreover occupy the place of a distinction which would really further its appreciation.

For there are, in the literature of realization, two very different kinds of comparison. There are illuminating, or intensifying, comparisons, where the things recalled only shed a light of strong reality upon the subject of discourse. Such are the metaphors we have been considering, and also both the similes and metaphors in the following lines:

"The words of his mouth were smoother than butter,
But war was in his heart;
His words were softer than oil,
Yet were they drawn swords."

"There is no faithfulness in their mouth;
Their throat is an open sepulchre——"

"But I am a worm, and no man——"

"Rottenness entereth into my bones."

"My heart is like wax; it is melted in the midst of my bowels——"

"I am poured out like water——"

On the other hand, there are comparisons in which the poetic impulse runs out into the things recalled, and you have a little excursion of realization away from the subject of discourse. And these we may call discursive or holiday comparisons, since they are so happily defiant of practical progress. They occur most frequently in the childhood of literature.

"The Lord is my shepherd;
I shall not want.
*He maketh me to lie down in green pastures:*
*He leadeth me beside the still waters.*
He restoreth my soul——"

"As for man, his days are as grass:
As a flower of the field, so he flourisheth.
*For the wind passeth over it, and it is gone;*
*And the place thereof shall know it no more.*"

Here for a moment man is quite forgotten in the tragedy of that little flower; and before, I think, the Lord was almost forgotten in a pastoral idyl.

Such wandering in a simile from the original

subject, while yet the original subject sustains and dignifies your enjoyment, is a special experience. It is poetically different from the purely illuminative use of comparison, because the realization lies for a moment in a new direction. Therefore the distinction of these two—although far less precise than the ones that the rhetorics draw—is of true importance to us.

"Allegory" and "fable" and "parable," and what has been called in Hebrew literature "direct metaphor," are poetry of this kind. "Direct metaphor" is simply an allegory with no overt transfer of names, no explanation of its symbolism. It is not more direct than other metaphors, but it is more extended. One occurs in Ecclesiastes beginning:

> "Remember now thy Creator in the days of thy youth——"

from which it has taxed the generations to extract the proper meaning. The same kind of metaphor occurs in the poetry of primitive people, and the same difficulty arises when we try to enjoy, or even to perceive, the comparisons in this poetry. We do not understand its metaphors, and even after they are explained we cannot *feel* their appropriateness, because the objects named have so different a flavor to our affections

from what they had to those who named them. This is a "Song of the Spirit Dance" among the Arapaho Indians:

"Wading passed I through
Yellow waters,
Wading passed I through
Yellow waters,
Ah, 'twas e'en, e'en the turtle lake—
Yellow waters—
Ah, 'twas e'en, e'en the turtle lake—
Yellow waters."

Dante has often this primitive quality. Allegory and extended metaphor are so natural to his mind that all his language, even in a prose translation, has a strange sound to us. He seems, almost like a bashful person, to shrink from naming the real subject of discourse, always intimating or indicating what it is by dwelling with a grave expression upon something else.

Now all these formal uses of comparison, being poetically different both in motive and effect, ought to be separated from the merely illuminative simile and metaphor. Only they ought not to be separated from discursive simile, which is the same thing in a far sweeter and more spontaneous form. The love of what lies at the *other side* of a comparison happens to carry us away, and we wander over there to look for a minute, before going on with the main poem.

"He shall feed his flocks like a shepherd.
*He shall gather the lambs in his arm,*
*And carry them in his bosom,*
*And shall gently lead those that give suck.*"

Only from the point of view of practical discourse, of the pure effort to convey a meaning, can any of this language be called indirect, or out of the simple and natural. The moment the poetic impulse is acknowledged, and to the extent that it is acknowledged, any true comparison appears entirely direct and primitive. See it, as we saw poetic choice, in the second member of a parallelism, where the meaning is already satisfied:

"Whose confidence shall break asunder,
*And whose trust is a spider's web.*"

Or see it in those verses from the Japanese, which have no practical motive, but are the atoms of poetry:

"Fall'n flower returning to the branch,—
Behold! it is a butterfly."

See it thus, and that sense of anything indirect, anything "turning aside," in poetic comparison, is impossible. Still more impossible if we look again to the very origins of formal poetry.

"Beautiful, lo, the summer clouds,
Beautiful, lo, the summer clouds,
Blossoming clouds in the sky
Like unto shimmering flowers——"

is the substance of a dance song among the Zuñi Indians. And this is a Hopi lullaby:

"Puva, puva, puva,[1]
In the trail the beetles
On each other's backs are sleeping,
So on mine, my baby, thou
Puva, puva, puva."

Sometimes in our own literature this sense of a whole poem as pure poetry is conveyed through a device called apostrophe. And apostrophe, by the irony of rhetoric, means "turning away." It is turning away from the progress of your argument in order to realize something you have mentioned. But happily in certain cases there is no argument, and there has been none, and so there can be no turning away, but the whole poem is a pure turning toward. An example from William Blake is appropriate here, because, like the other poems we have referred to, it makes its appeal almost without the help of metrical music; it is poetry through the perfection of poignant choice and comparison.

"TO THE EVENING STAR

"Thou fair-haired Angel of the Evening,
Now whilst the sun rests on the mountains, light
Thy bright torch of love—thy radiant crown
Put on, and smile upon our evening bed!

[1] "Puva" is a verb meaning sleep.

Smile on our loves; and while thou drawest the
Blue curtains of the sky, scatter thy silver dew
On every flower that shuts its sweet eyes
In timely sleep. Let thy west wind sleep on
The lake; speak silence with thy glimmering eyes
And wash the dusk with silver.—Soon, full soon,
Dost thou withdraw; then the wolf rages wide,
And the lion glares through the dun forest.
The fleeces of our flocks are covered with
Thy sacred dew; protect them with thine influence!"

It will not appear, in this wrought harmony of realizations, so easy a thing to choose and compare poetically, as it may have appeared in the analysis. It is not a thing that every one can do well. The qualities that it requires are three, and they are three that rarely lodge in the same mind—sensitiveness, and self-knowledge, and sympathy. For the poet must receive the being of things with his whole nature, and yet he must know the motions of his mind in receiving them, and he must know the motions of all minds, lest his poetry be private and incommunicable.

## CHAPTER VII

## WINE AND SLEEP AND POETRY

The joy of drunkenness to an Anglo-Saxon is that it gives lustre to his trivial experiences. He gets adventure without doing much. Having lulled with the narcotic those hereditary inhibitions which made him appear phlegmatic, he can come into that state of receptive exaltation which is native to the wine-souled Italian. Liberated from the tyranny of his own opinions, liberated from his self-esteem, his diffidence, or prudence, or good judgment, he is now able to taste life. And it was really for this same virtue that wine was anciently praised, for this purpose it was used—to heighten the flush of experience, and make one return, as Plato said, "into the state of soul in which he was when a young child."

The revels of Dionysus—perfections in the memory of some rural harvest carnival—reveal, through a glamour of mysticism, just this extremity of enthusiasm for the flavor of the world. Wild youths, and creatures with youth in them—satyrs, and fauns, and mænads, the lynx, the goat, the dolphin—a laughter of Bacchus falling upon them, hale each other forth with roses and

ivy-crowns and vine-leaves trailing, snakes and torches and flutes and hallelujahs, to celebrate a fervent progress through the world. A triumph after no achievement, and a conscription leading to no deeds; a festive and terrific celebration of being.

> Over the light blue hills
> There came a noise of revellers: the rills
> Into the wide stream came of purple hue—
> 'Twas Bacchus and his crew!
> The earnest trumpet spake, and silver thrills
> From kissing cymbals made a merry din—
> 'Twas Bacchus and his kin
> Like to a moving vintage down they came,
> Crown'd with green leaves, and faces all on flame;
> All madly dancing through the pleasant valley . ."

Akin to the spirituous insanity of these joyful creatures, is a certain mood of the imagination in somnolescence, or midnight waking. Do there not sometimes, as you fall asleep, come swimming before your eyes in vivid portraiture, shapes and scenes and faces, grotesque or beautiful, but of such speaking realness that they make you move? Or do you ever wake at midnight to find your soul naked to the touch of the world? Little things that you care for, yesterday's, or to-morrow's, or a lifetime's—they are too real. Sometimes the trees stand out this way before a storm. Each being is as though it had non-being for a

background. In these hours none too sober, I think we are not far from the well-springs of poetry. Activity has ceased and the senses sleep, but there is energy of perception under the eyelids, and the world re-creates itself with fervor there.

Neither dreams nor the complete illusions of hypnosis, but just on the moonlight verge of them —the wakeful lethargy in which a creak of the floor seems an earthquake, and things with the special values of unreality acquire all the vividness of the real—this is the condition in which imaginative realization can vie in its intensity with the sensuous experience of a Bacchanalian. This is the condition into which the poet must bring us. He must lull us into our exaltation. And for this purpose, like a mother to her child in the night, he brings music. He cradles us in rhythm and soothes us with a perpetual and half-monotonous melody.

Music is wine to the imagination. And the essence of music, originally and in this respect, is rhythm, or the regular recurrence of a pleasant stroke. The trance-engendering power of such recurrence, however it may be explained, was anciently known and is easily verified. Patting and stroking are nature's anodynes. We rock our babies to sleep, we smooth the foreheads of the

fretful, and we love to slide into oblivion ourselves, carrying with us the continual tirl of rain-drops on a roof, or beneath us in the darkness the murmur of a brook. Bernheim, the great scientific magician, hypnotized his patients usually by muttering "sleep—sleep—sleep," and stroking them with his hand; then, without altering the cadence of his voice, he could introduce imaginations into their minds, and make them realize vividly the presence of things even while they knew them to be illusory. This is an experiment which almost any two people may try, and in a few moments they will feel an original connection between rhythm and imaginative realization.

There is, perhaps, a yet more original and more broad connection between rhythm and all realization. It seems as if there must be, because rhythm is used, not only to lull the body and set free the imagination, but also, like wine itself, to excite the body to the last degree of the intensity of real experience. These are the two primitive uses of the recurrent stimulus, and somehow they both survive in poetry. The very metrical monotony that drowses us becomes, when we are lost to coarser things, a turbulent and stimulating stream along our veins. And no theory will ever adequately unfold the magic of such utterance that does not grant and reconcile these two effects.

Until such a theory is devised, and commands us to the contrary, we can please our minds at least with the following analogy:

Suppose that we figure the nervous current which corresponds to consciousness as proceeding, like so many other currents of nature, in *waves*—then we do receive a new apprehension, if not an explanation, of the strange power over us of successive strokes. For to regulate a consciousness would be to regulate waves, and how else would that be accomplished than by a calculated rhythmic impetus? It seems to me that, in the entire lack of anything better deserving the name, we might almost call this analogy explanation, for it describes in physical terms what every one can say mentally—that rhythm seems to chime in with the very nature of his state of being and control it. Such an explanation will have this advantage too, that it does not demand an artificial separation of emotion from sensation, or imagination from thought, but it allows for the rhythmic elevation of all these kinds of experience. Whatever things occupy our attention—events, objects, tones, combinations of tones, emotions, pictures, images, ideas—our consciousness of them will be heightened by the rhythm as though it consisted of waves. And what is still more to the credit of the analogy, this effect will be strong, if

not strongest, when the rhythm is not *perceived* at all, but the attention is directed elsewhere.

Shelley has expressed in a fragment, which is better information than poetry, a special pleasure of his which rested upon this fact.

> "How sweet it is to sit and read the tales
> Of mighty poets, and to hear the while
> Sweet music, which, when the attention fails,
> Fills the dim pause——"

Apparently he did not guess the truth, that the music acted while his mind was engrossed even more than in the pauses of the tale. But there can be little doubt of it. Music upon the inattentive ear is a most insidious stimulant. Perhaps it is for this that we so often beat a rhythm with our fingers when we think. At any rate, to many it is a pleasure not exactly "sweet," but better than that, to have some tune around them when their mind is steadily occupied upon anything. It need not be the tales of mighty poets, nor need the music be better than a hurdy-gurdy at the street corner. The effect is the same —a kind of high buoyancy of thought, with that accentuation of the reality of thought's objects. And I take it to lie, either like hypnosis in the lulling of the body and the prudential mind, the partial liberating of imagery from inhibitions of maturity and civilization, or, like the madness of

dancers, in a general intensification of all experience. Some day both these things, the imaginative suggestibility and the physical ecstasy, the sleep and wine in poetry, may be harmonized together in explanation by a mature science, but at present we are free to speculate a while among them and leave them undetermined.

However it may go with the explanation, there is no undetermination of the fact that rhythm promotes every realization. A great new art of these days is the moving-picture show, and I have yet to find one in which the reality of the pictures is not enhanced with the beating of an old piano. Nobody notices the piano, nobody remembers what the piano played, or how badly, but there it is, always keeping up a *metre*. And even when the motion films give out, and there are thrown on the screen those old still scenes of true love by moonlight, still it pounds away, and the audience melts to the mood of credulous romance. Their voluntary mind is upon the canvas, but that music slips all the deeper into their being, and it makes them live the pictures.

The high and wide popularity of this art both makes plausible the rise of epics, and gives assurance of the future of poetry. For poetry too is a series of pictures accompanied by appropriate music. The pictures are to the imagination, and

not to its eye only but to its whole being; and the music is of a more subtle volume; but other than this there is no difference. Ages ago we can understand how those with the gift of seeing pictures, and the naming gift, availed themselves of the dance ecstasies of their tribe to get voice and ear for a little vivid utterance. We can imagine through centuries the gradual union of that poetic employment of speech which we have described as beginning when speech began, with the employment of rhythm to intensify experience upon festal occasions, until a custom and an art of poetry arises, and there are ballad-singers singing to the dance. Like speech itself into the earlier darkness of the tribes, a poet steps into the circle of these dumb carnivals and illumines them. Nor will it be long after that before he begins to gather his own circles, and sing to his own music or his own dancing, telling in metrical and poetic syllables the tales of the tribe. And the experience of his hearers will be purely imaginary. It will be pure poetry—a realization in the rhythmic trance of things that are absent and events that are not happening.

That is the origin, so far as we know, of the first poem, the metrical story, the ballad, the epic. And no one who sees it there, primitive and inevitable, and then sees it again here in our own thea-

tres, the same thing only a little less tranced and more palpable—as adapted to a people who have their sophistication to overcome—no one who sees it so, or once so feels it in his own nature, will doubt that the union of rhythm and the language of realization was great and will be eternal.

# CHAPTER VIII

## REALIZATION OF ACTION

THE earliest poems were stories, and story poems are ever the most popular. Perhaps they are popular in spite of their poetry rather than because of it. For that onward voracity of the will to which a narrative appeals is different, and is almost always more compelling, than the inclination to realize. So compelling is it that often it makes us impatient of the delay and we resent poetry in a tale as much as we should in a book of technical science. "It is a good story," we say, "if you skip the descriptions." And while this may sometimes indicate that the descriptions are mere inventory, at other times it indicates a deep antipathy between the mood of anticipation and that of realization. A narrative poem is an unstable compound, and will generally fall out to be, in the reader's mind, either a good narrative or a good poem, but rarely both.

On the other hand, granted that the reader's mood is poetic, and that he is more eager to receive an experience than to find out a result, it will be easier to convey to him through language the experience of an action than the experience of an

inactive thing. It is easier to make a series of words vividly suggest a series of events, than to make them suggest a collocation of objects. "He starts, he jumps, he runs!" gives a sharper touch to the imagination than "It is red, white, and blue!" And yet each is a mere list of practical names. I think the reason for this difference is that, in the first case, the words stand in the same relation to each other as the acts they name, they succeed each other in time; whereas in the second, the words succeed each other in time, but the qualities they name co-exist in space—it therefore requires a special kind of word to make us pause and receive them vividly.

This similarity of the utterance of words to the forth-striking of events has given rise to the celebrated opinion that the only proper subject for poetry is action.[1] But it would be truer to say that the first and easiest subject for poetry is action. Granted that the poetic intention is understood, it requires little technique of choice or comparison to make a succession of words conjure

[1] "If it is true that painting employs in its imitations entirely different means or symbols from those adopted by poetry—*i. e.*, the former using forms and colors in space, the latter, on the other hand, articulate sounds in time—if it is admitted that these symbols must be in suitable relation to the thing symbolized, then symbols placed in juxtaposition can only express subjects of which the wholes or parts exist in juxtaposition; and consecutive symbols

up a succession of events. A trimmed narrative is almost inevitably poetic.

"Enoch walked with God: and he was not; for God took him."

And when to this natural ease of creating and receiving the poetry of narrative we add the fact that unpoetic readers can ignore its poetry and eat up the narrative only, if they wish to, we have abundant explanation of the greater popularity of the story poem.

Ballad-singing is an art almost universally pleasure-giving. But the pleasure in ballads divides itself very sharply into these two kinds: on the one hand, that of persons not especially poetic, which may be described as a pleasure in finding their way to the end, and, on the other, that of poetic persons, a pleasure in viewing the whole as a single and simple jewel—a painting of action more poetic by the grace of nature than its author had the genius to make it. And melody adds to

can only express subjects of which the wholes or parts are consecutive.

"Subjects, the wholes or parts of which exist in juxtaposition, are termed bodies. Consequently bodies, with their visible properties, are the special subjects of painting.

"Subjects, the wholes or parts of which are consecutive, are generally termed actions. Consequently actions are the special subjects of poetry."—Lessing's "Laocoön," chapter XVI.

the first kind of pleasure the excitement of suspense, while rhythm exalts the pure poetry of ballads.

"Hie upon Hielands,
And laigh[1] upon Tay,
Bonny George Campbell
Rode out on a day,
Saddled and bridled
Sae gallant to see.
Hame cam' his gude horse,
But never cam' he.

"Down ran his auld mither,
Greetin' fu' sair;
Out ran his bonny bride,
Reaving her hair;
'My meadow lies green,
And my corn is unshorn,
My barn is too bigg,
And my babe is unborn.'

"Saddled and bridled,
And booted rode he;
A plume in his helmet,
A sword at his knee;
But toom[2] cam' his saddle
A' bluidy to see,
O hame cam' his gude horse,
But never cam' he."

These ballads of the people, though they derive from the fingers of time a touch of perfection not their own, were none the less surely the work of poets. They have a discrimination of emotional

[1] laigh = low [2] toom = empty

atmosphere, an occasional poetic word used with exquisite regard to that, which proves the receiving mind. It proves that the purpose of this beginning was not merely to reach the end. We are permitted to pause at the sight of that bonny bride "reaving her hair." Yet, upon the whole, there is a scarcity of these choices in ballad literature, and a repetition of conventional comparisons, which reveals in their authors a dilution of the poetic love with a too forward look. They have not that idle enjoyment of qualities which delays the action in great epics. The Iliad and the Odyssey were sung to an achieving people and they rely for popularity, like ballads, fundamentally upon their core of narrative suspense; yet they assume with a more royal assurance that their hearers will be hospitable to the individual nature of the events detailed, and that the world in which these events happen is itself worth looking round in.

Only a truly poetic fervor will endure the delays in Homer, or consider that the Iliad is not a cluttered narrative. The poet is never more alive than when he has stopped the action, and lined up his combatants, upon one excuse or another, to contemplate their aspect. I quote one of these instances for the simple poetic delight that it gives.

"So, high in hope, they sat the whole night through
In warlike lines, and many watch-fires blazed.
As when in heaven the stars look brightly forth
Round the clear-shining moon, while not a breeze
Stirs in the depths of air, and all the stars
Are seen, and gladness fills the shepherd's heart,
So many fires in sight of Ilium blazed,
Lit by the sons of Troy, between the ships
And eddying Xanthus: on the plain there shone
A thousand; fifty warriors by each fire
Sat in its light. Their steeds beside the cars—
Champing their oats and their white barley—stood
And waited for the golden morn to rise."

Not only after night comes on, however, and while the actors sleep, does Homer make his lingerings and excursions, but even in the heat of battle and while spears quiver in the fists of heroes. Perhaps the most soul-surprising calamity that could befall the Greeks was that their bulwark Ajax, large of muscle and soul, should fall away before the horses of the car of Hector, which came crashing through the ranks like a storm of wind.

"Father Jove Almighty touched with fear
The heart of Ajax!"

Here surely is a situation of which we cry for the outcome! And yet for the length of fifty lines and more we are expected to drink in the spectacle, and not only that, but even to depart from it upon a tour of reminiscence. A hungry lion

was driven off from the cattle-yards by a crowd of farmers; a gang of small boys with sticks went after a donkey that had broken loose into the harvest.

Nor only in these extreme demands upon our geniality does the epic poet reveal his scorn of mere getting there; but even in the swiftest passages he paints with a loving hand. He flashes a detail or a likeness before us as quick as a word.

"I followed on their flight *like a black tempest;* fifty cars I took,"

says boasting Nestor.

"Illustrious Hector sprang
Into the camp. His look was *stern as night.*"

"Down plunged
The Lycian, *like a diver,* from his place
On the high tower, and life forsook his limbs."

Deaths are the supreme things in the Iliad. Never a warrior falls but some acutely specific noise, or pose, or shuddering exposure of him, is made, that puts the event into your very marrow.

"The spear passed through and reappeared behind.
*Down sat the wounded man with arms outstretched.*"

"The helm
Of massive brass was vain to stay the blow:
The weapon pierced it and the bone, and *stained*
*The brain with blood*——[9]

"It pierced the spine
Where the head joins the neck, and severed there
The tendons on each side. *His head and mouth*
*And nostrils struck the ground before his knees.*"

Such intensity of specification reminds us, in a way, of the Psalms. And yet there is no felt delay of the action. It is surely the height of poetic narrative, when realization and suspense thus unite, not to exasperate, but to exalt each other. Homer was at times a master of such vividness in rapidity, but neither he nor any other poet has in this equalled Shakespeare. Look to Shakespeare for the poetry of verbs.

"He waxed like a sea."

"Struck Corioli like a planet."

"As weeds before
A vessel under sail, so men obey'd
And fell below his stem——"

"—from face to foot
He was a thing of blood, whose every motion
Was tim'd with dying cries."

"And to the battle came he; where he did
Run reeking o'er the lives of men, as if
'T were a perpetual spoil."

Never was richer freight of sensuous and emotional experience hung on a swifter tale. Never, unless you could pack the whole original parturi-

tion of verbs out of nouns, and adjectives, and each other for prehistoric ages, into a single tumultuous volume, could you excel the metaphoric portrayal of action with which Shakespeare astonishes the world.

"Not Romans—" says Coriolanus, "as they are not,
Though *calv'd* i' the porch o' the capitol."

"And still to *nose* the offence——"

"With this ungracious paper ***strike***
The sight——"

"This kiss, if it durst speak,
Would *stretch thy spirits up into* ***the air.***"

"Blow winds and *crack your cheeks!*"

Such a wanton manipulation of words could awaken nothing but wrath in a man like Tolstoy, whose terrific poetic enthusiasm seems to have been narrowed in his later years almost to the exclusive enjoyment of the moral emotions. We can imagine his saying, in one of his novels, that the wind was blowing round like a giant. But that would not do for Shakespeare; he must specify at once. He sees the giant as quick and clearly as he feels the wind. And that sudden, exaggerative realization, to the contemptuous destruction of grammar, logic, and all reliable sobriety, of

everything under the sun that is mentioned, appeared to his sombre critic to be a ranting degeneration of the organ which exists for purposes of moral intelligence. Yet in reality that and no other quality has made centuries of men worship Shakespeare, in spite of all the sins and failings as an artist or a sage which Tolstoy more justly ascribes to him—and in spite even of the unperceiving adulation of his other critics. He is, with Shelley, the supremely poetic genius of the English language. And in the power of feeling action, he is high above them all.

It is doubtless this fact that made him so great a dramatist. Yet it must not be thought that by "the realization of action" we mean to recall that outworn distinction of dramatic from lyric and epic poetry. Drama was regarded as a division of poetry by Aristotle simply because prose dramas were unknown to him. In all the Greek theatres the actors spoke poetry, and hence a distinction between the art of acting and this manner of speaking never occurred to him. The whole performance was covered by the term "dramatic poetry." For us, however, if we were not still tangled in the scholastic tradition that he started, the term would have no value whatever. Poetry is a kind of speech, and writers of drama may put this into the mouths of their actors, or they may not.

When they do, it is not a different kind of poetry from what it would be in their own mouths or anywhere else. Therefore, when we say that Shakespeare is supreme in the poetry of action, we mean that when he makes one of his characters speak of an action, that action comes before you like a reality. In the language of his own prologue, you

> Think when he talks of horses that you see them,
> Printing their proud hoofs i' the receiving earth.

Let us illustrate the mental origin of this high-handed management of verbs which we attribute especially to Shakespeare. I suppose that almost any poetic man or child, if he were to say "I straddle the fence," would have some dim passing of the shadow of a horse through his mind. He might even say, if he were in a playful mood, "as though it were a horse," or "I pretend it is a horse." But if he said this in the midst of a stirring narrative, we should resent the delay. "I horse the fence," on the contrary, would both flash the comparison and make us jump forward all the faster. And yet it appears that nobody but Shakespeare ever wrote, who continually could and did solve these difficulties thus at a stroke. Upon the slightest hint from imagination, he interchanges verbs, he puts nouns or adjectives in

the place of verbs. For poetry's sake, he disrupts all barriers between the parts of speech, reverting to practical barbarity—and it is this, the highest power of the poetic impulse in literature, that makes his language a distinct creation amazing in the way that language itself would be amazing to one discovering it.

It is not uncommon to hear a Shakesperian expression upon a child's lips, where language is truly being born. "The hurt blooded," for example, is vivid through a spontaneous transfer of the parts of speech.

Verbs are fewer than nouns; they are more highly generalized and more rigidly distinguished from each other. The truth is, they are of greater practical importance than nouns, a more finished instrument, and their conventional hold upon the mind is stronger. So it has hardly ever occurred to rhetoricians that verbs are subject to such liberties as Shakespeare took with them. They have regarded metaphor, or condensed comparison, as a function of nouns only. But if they had understood that metaphor is only an exaggeration of that comparison between two experiences which is intimated by almost any poetic name, they could hardly have made this error. When Burns says of the mountain daisy,

"Yet cheerfully thou *glinted* forth amid the storm——"

he avails himself, only more instantly, of the same comparison that he uses when he calls the flower itself a "bonny gem." Both the noun and the verb are names that compare. And when Tennyson says,

> "Let the wild
> Lean-headed eagles *yelp* alone!"

he puts into that verb more power of the comparison with ranging dogs, or jackals, than he could with any overt metaphor that a rhetoric would recognize. He paints the action with the very word that names it. He paints for once as Shakespeare would.

Generally, however, the less drastic poets have been content to color actions by the use of simile or modifying clause or phrase. And they have been perpetually tormented by the fact that such modifiers, while they enhance the poetic effect in the accepted way, nevertheless tend to destroy with art that poetry which pertains by nature to a swift succession of names conveying action. In some form this problem is rarely absent from the deliberations of a narrative poet. How shall he realize a moving thing without stopping it?

In those rare first stanzas of the poem "To a Waterfowl," by William Cullen Bryant, occur these lines:

"As, darkly seen against the crimson sky,
Thy figure floats along."

And Bryant is said to have originally written:

"As, darkly painted on the crimson sky,
Thy figure floats along."

He made the change, I believe, in fidelity to the poetry which nature, and not he, created—the trueness of the naked verse to motion. And that difficulty, that sacrifice, is symbolic for all writers of poetic narrative. When their art cannot exalt and vivify without delay, then they are better without the art, as Byron was. Let their narrative be clear, and swift, and rhythmical—it is inevitably poetic.

Yet its poetry is never, for the common reader, the essence of it. For the essence of all high narrative is anticipation, and the essence of poetry is realization, and they are opposed. It was, indeed, the discovery of their difference, the separation of story-telling from the poetic art, that lost for poetry its universal place and influence. It was not industry, nor sanity, nor science, nor the greater generality of language—none of these things has so profoundly affected the prevalence of poetic language. But the common novel, and the prose drama, and the newspaper—made very meagre in specific qualities of experience, but full

of general suspense—have supplanted poetry in people's idle hours. Poetic utterance is returning into the novel, as all the followers of Turgenieff witness; poetic utterance is even returning with popularity into the theatre. As for the newspapers—the world will yet recover from that mania. And meanwhile poetry will live beside them, if not loved so much perhaps, or by so many, yet loved more purely for itself.

## CHAPTER IX

## REALIZATION OF THINGS

When people began to tell stories in practical words, the distinctive qualities of poetic words became more sharply observed. Colors and shapes, and smells, and sounds of concrete things, were seen constantly attracting the attention in the language of poets. It was sensuous language. It appeared to move somewhat slowly and be full of pictures. And so there arose among those who were seeking to catch and confine the essence of poetry, which is quicksilver, within the limits of a definition, the term "word-painting." With that they thought to sum up the whole difference between poetry and practical speech.

And when we turn from the swift and all too naked tale of some elopement, as it may appear in a popular novel, or in the morning paper, to such a poem as "The Eve of Saint Agnes," we may feel perhaps that "word-painting" is a true definition of the difference. In the poem it is not what happens—that can wait!—but to whom, and where, and in what light, among what draperies and music, with what warmth and cold, what

weather beating on the panes—these are the interests that we dwell upon. The whole first stanza gives us little more information than would a glance at the thermometer, but it gives a view and a sensation that winter's self could not excel:

"St. Agnes' Eve—Ah, bitter chill it was!
The owl, for all his feathers, was a-cold;
The hare limp'd trembling through the frozen grass,
And silent was the flock in woolly fold:
Numb were the Beadsman's fingers, while he told
His rosary, and while his frosted breath——"

Lingering upon these words, receiving them into our veins, is it not possible for us to be entranced away from our too palpable surroundings, to shiver with the old man muttering there so long ago in futile piety, to feel our own fingers large, and see that swift white disappearance of the breath on frosty air? That is the mood in which the poem will be enjoyed. It is a serenely moving series of high portraitures. It seems a miracle that written words should ever have so richly painted on a page the full experience of the senses.

"A casement high and triple-arch'd there was,
All garlanded with carven imag'ries
Of fruits, and flowers, and bunches of knot-grass,
And diamonded with panes of quaint device,
Innumerable of stains and splendid dyes,
As are the tiger-moth's deep-damask'd wings;
And in the midst, 'mong thousand heraldries,

And twilight saints, and dim emblazonings,
A shielded scutcheon blush'd with blood of queens and kings.

"Full on this casement shone the wintry moon,
And threw warm gules on Madeline's fair breast,
As down she knelt for Heaven's grace and boon;
Rose-bloom fell on her hands, together prest,
And on her silver cross soft amethyst,
And on her hair a glory, like a saint:
She seem'd a splendid angel, newly drest,
Save wings, for heaven:—Porphyro grew faint:
She knelt, so pure a thing, so free from mortal taint.

"Anon his heart revives: her vespers done,
Of all its wreathèd pearls her hair she frees;
Unclasps her warmèd jewels one by one;
Loosens her fragrant bodice; by degrees
Her rich attire creeps rustling to her knees:
Half-hidden, like a mermaid in sea-weed,
Pensive awhile she dreams awake, and sees,
In fancy, fair Saint Agnes in her bed,
But dares not look behind, or all the charm is fled.

"Soon, trembling in her soft and chilly nest,
In sort of wakeful swoon, perplex'd she lay,
Until the poppied warmth of sleep oppress'd
Her soothèd limbs, and soul fatigued away;
Flown, like a thought, until the morrow-day;
Blissfully haven'd both from joy and pain;
Clasp'd like a missal where swart Paynims pray;
Blinded alike from sunshine and from rain,
As though a rose should shut, and be a bud again.

. . . . . .

"Then by the bed-side, where the faded moon
Made a dim, silver twilight, soft he set
A table, and, half anguish'd, threw thereon

A cloth of woven crimson, gold, and jet:—
O for some drowsy Morphean amulet!
The boisterous, midnight, festive clarion,
The kettle-drum, and far-heard clarionet,
Affray his ears, though but in dying tone:—
The hall door shuts again, and all the noise is gone.

"And still she slept an azure-lidded sleep,
In blanchèd linen, smooth, and lavender'd,
While he from forth the closet brought a heap
Of candied apple, quince, and plum, and gourd;
With jellies soother than the creamy curd,
And lucent syrops, tinct with cinnamon;
Manna and dates, in argosy transferr'd
From Fez; and spicèd dainties, every one,
From silken Samarcand to cedar'd Lebanon."

We cannot refrain from asking upon what principles a poet makes these choices and comparisons, that with their magic he creates out of that thin line of words a full environment. Upon what general rules could we be taught to say the "silver-snarling trumpets," or "twilight saints," or "azure-lidded sleep," or "jellies soother than the creamy curd," and so convey a presence to the ear, the eye, the tongue? We cannot refrain from asking such questions, but we can, if we are wise, refrain from answering them. We can say: Go to the particulars—there are no rules! Or rather: There is a new principle, and a new rule, for every act of greatness. They are Time's fools who summarize.

One of the principles at least is Beauty. "Azure-lidded sleep" is beautiful. But Beauty—even in this poem—is by no means supreme. "Snarling" as a name for trumpets is more surprising for its truth, a kind of outrage against beauty. Beauty pleads against whole pages of the greatest poetry. I think of Spenser's awful stanza where the dragon spreads her filth; no ingenuous mind would call it beautiful. I think of Shakespeare's execrations. I think of Whitman.

> "The malform'd limbs are tied to the surgeon's table,
> What is removed drops horribly in a pail."

> "The prostitute draggles her shawl, her bonnet bobs on her tipsy and pimpled neck."

No, not beauty, nor yet unbeauty—not truth nor untruth, nor simplicity, nor complexity, nor the sublime, nor the familiar, nor the thing whose name is rhythmical, nor the thing whose name gives welcome interruption to the rhythm, nor the exciting, nor the soothing, nor the characteristic, nor even the unhabitual, is a master principle for the art of giving names. There is no master principle for that art whose very nature is to shun generality, and cleave to the unique nature of each individual experience.

There is no master principle—but there is a principle that rises in its generality above the others, because it is based deeper in the nature of our consciousness. It is not the principle of the beautiful, however, but of the unhabitual. Poetry is the art of keeping us awake in idleness, and to that end it is almost essential that, however a thing be named, it should not be named with exactly the words that we expect. Habit is the arch-enemy of realization. No matter how poetic a name may have been in its first application, or when we first received it, let it grow common in that application, and, even though it should acquire no practical use, its life withers away. The choice and the comparison both die out of it. It learns to slide unnoticed through the mind. Homer's most awakening epithets became, with endless repetition, no better for the purposes of poetry than *Jack* or *John*. And we have killed with iteration in our churches half the living words of Hebrew poets. It was a daring realization of the believed nature of Christ to call him *Lamb of God;* it was still more daring a comparison to call him *King*. But to us these words are only faded labels, and we interchange, or mix them, indiscriminately.

"Crown him with many crowns,
The Lamb upon his throne!"

we sing, in sleepy oblivion of a ridiculous picture! Most of the hymns are dead. And to those piously reared, a great part of the Bible itself is beyond reviving. Its words have grown habitual, and their poetry has ceased to be.

The fact that poetic words are thus ever fading with use, and degenerating into mere designations, and the fact that it is not always easy to tell how far they have faded, gives rise to the old schoolroom tragedy of "mixed figures." A "mixed figure" is either the union of two incongruous comparisons—as in the example of the crowned lamb—or it is the use of a comparison accidentally inappropriate to its object, as when I say "he *landed* in the water." These are both errors of the lifeless imagination, and due to the fact that a name once poetic has grown habitual. "To *land* upon something" was at first a sufficiently living metaphor taken from the sea, but it long ago grew common, and the practical mood seized upon it, and now it can be applied even to its own poetic opposite without our feeling the incongruity. When poetic words have gone as far as that into the blight of custom, they may well be called dead, and dedicated to the use of science. For science is seeking to give permanent names, with fixed habits of reaction attached to them, whereas the names of poetry are by their very definition new and transitory.

Many a sharp divergence in poetry from the common usages of language has no other justification—and needs none—than lies in the fact that it is a divergence. It begets surprise, which is close kin to consciousness itself. There is an intrepid defiance of expectation in that poem of Edward Carpenter's, "Little Brook Without a Name"—one of the very precious poems of recent times. "The little mouse," he says, "the water-shrew, walks (*even like Jesus Christ*) upon the flood, paddling quickly over the surface with its half-webbed feet." The poet had, no doubt, a practical purpose—to intend by this comparison the kinship in divinity of all nature—but he was not blind, I believe, to the pure poetic value of our astonishment. Homer himself cannot be said to have been above an interest in shocking his readers, when he so unexpectedly announced that

> "Prayers
> Are the daughters of Almighty Jupiter,
> *Lame, wrinkled,* and *squint-eyed*——"

Such extreme measures are at times indispensable to the sustainment of poetry. Something has to explode. Our souls must be invaded and ravaged, so ponderous is their lethargy in which they apprehend only vague presences and general bearings of things. Sing "Lord! Lord!" forever, and you rouse no heart to repentance; but shout

"Sky-Blasting Jehovah!" and some necks will move.

This, then, is a principle—if beyond the acts themselves of choosing and comparing there can be a general principle—upon which the poet makes his words, which are consecutive, paint objects which are juxtaposed. He makes the words surprise us, and we look around. "The very colors of her coat," he says of the virgin, "were better than good news!" And who can pass instantly from such a phrase, or from the contemplation of such colors? The invisible skylark singing is "like an unbodied joy"—he brings the abstract into the contemplation of the concrete, reversing the customs even of poetry, and we cannot but pause there in wonder. Or he violates the very discrimination of our separate senses, the deepest habit of perceptual life: "The fire *cries* with light," he says. All possible disorganizations of the categories, not of grammar only, but of perception, and of thought, belong to poetry, because these too are habits, and in them our individual spirits sleep.

Surprise belongs to poetry. But let us say no more than that. Let us not try to make even the unhabitual an absolute or unqualified rule. It seems, indeed, that the greater a poet's experience, the more is his reliance upon this principle miti-

gated, or at least mingled with other considerations. Greater poets do not *merely* surprise us, but they surprise us with the true, the beautiful, the ugly, the distinctive, in a thing. They surprise us oftenest by telling us most exactly what we knew.

"The cat on the house-sill" strikes off to my thought a picture clear as day, and "the sun-warm cat" is a touch to my hand. Yet I am not sure but, if I took a glance over the world, I should find that a large majority of cats are both "sun-warm," and "on the house-sill." It is altogether inevitable, and yet signally characteristic of them, that they should be. There is no strained acuteness of perception in the poets whose poetry is nature. Their words are only the things they sing of.

"The chanting linnet, or the mellow thrush;
Hailing the setting sun, sweet, in the green thorn bush——"

Thus to awaken us with words that are only the surest words, is a high gift, which comports with all that we call classic. It was this that made the early fame of Robert Burns eternal. And I think it was this too—the simple, the inevitable, in her singing—that gave to Sappho the supreme place in antiquity and through time. She was called

"The Poet," because her very looking upon a thing was poetry, and her poetry was but looking upon it. To Evening she said:

"Evening, you bring all things that the bright morning scattered wide,
You bring the sheep, you bring the goat, you bring the child to his mother."

Perhaps it requires some acquaintance with poetry to develop a high appreciation of what is so greatly simple in choice or comparison. Perhaps the whole joy of it is never felt except as a relief after the self-conscious astonishments that are delivered to us by less mature genius. When Homer tells us that Ajax gave ground before his opponent by "moving knee after knee," if we are old enough in the love of poetry to perceive that anything has been said at all, we perceive that the final word for the imagination has been said. It is not a word ingenious, weighty, significant, or suggestive of anything but its object. It is simply the exact truth of perception, conveyed with singleness and restraint. It surprises us with unsurprise—and that, if it be paradoxical enough to destroy itself, we may safely set up as a master principle. It is a final perfection of the art of painting things with words.

## CHAPTER X

## EMOTIONAL REALIZATION

"The Eve of Saint Agnes" is wonderful, not only for the vividness of its pictures, but for the fact that they are made to move before us in a stream of romantic feeling. The feeling is pure and sustained; and therein the poet has revealed a great part of his genius. He has roused in us, besides an imagination of things, the real experience of an emotion. He has done this, however, by those same acts of choice and comparison. He has chosen for vivid imagining, many things about which the emotion is wont to cling, and compared them with other things having the same quality. In many parts of the poem this has been the sole motive of his words.

The ode "To a Nightingale" is perhaps even more completely dominated by an emotion. Let us consider, without any context, one stanza of it:

"Fade far away, dissolve, and quite forget
What thou among the leaves hast never known,
The weariness, the fever, and the fret
Here, where men sit and hear each other groan;
Where palsy shakes a few, sad, last gray hairs,
Where youth grows pale, and spectre-thin, and dies;

Where but to think is to be full of sorrow
And leaden-ey'd despairs,
Where beauty cannot keep her lustrous eyes,
Or new Love pine at them beyond to-morrow."

As a realization of the sorrow of life, we can see—perhaps without the violation of a too minute analysis—the high conscious or intuitive skill of poetry with which this stanza was fashioned. Tired, feverous, and anxious people, old people, young people growing old, beauty and love ceasing to be—these are the things chosen to sustain the emotion. And they in turn are made vivid by a second choice of their piercing details—the pallor, the groaning, the gray hairs sad and few, the thinness of the sick, and those "lustrous" eyes—wondering tearfully at the promise of their own decay—and finally that newness of love, that in the morning is gone. And our sense of these things, our consciousness, is still further enhanced by comparisons and intimations of comparison too subtle to be told. They are like spectres, the thin people, and the eyelids are lead, and the thinking of it all is like a well filled full of sorrow.

It is ungrateful to explain a wonder, and fortunately it is not altogether possible. The stinging residual essence of every experience is individual, and not to be set forth in general language. The best of poetry is when it starts the old indefinable

echo of reminiscence and hope. The quality of some vital instant in our past, or our ancestors', some tremulous balance of the affections, is just re-suggested and appears there only as fleeing from us for an instant, and then it is gone into the past again, and we into the future, forever.

For the attainment of these moments there are no rules, because they depend upon the things that make us different from each other. Each will have his own chosen poems. We can only generally declare this much—that wherever a poignant emotion is sustained, a sensuous memory sustains it. Even those passions that we call intellectual, or spiritual, seek always an image and cling to it. When God becomes a spirit, Christ is begotten. And when Christ is blended with God, we worship the cross that he died on. It is only thus we can hold our love and our pain. As Walt Whitman, in his psalm of the death of Abraham Lincoln, has merged the very body of sorrow in a trinity of sensations, the fragrance of lilacs, the pendulous star, and the quivering voice of a bird—

"Lilac and star and bird twined with the chant of my soul,
There in the fragrant pines and the cedars dusk and dim——"

so has the human heart always done with that which it would have eternal.

Poetry is not often written without strong emotion, and not often without a dim desire to eternalize emotion. And this again has persuaded men who love that quality of poetry to a limiting definition. They have held that to enjoy emotion without anxiety is the essence of poetic pleasure. This opinion was intimated in the writings of Wordsworth and Shelley, but reached its highest scientific expression in an essay of John Stuart Mill, who defines the natural poets as "those who are so constituted, that emotions are the links of association by which their ideas, both sensuous and spiritual, are connected together."

We can see the reason for this opinion by examining almost any lines of Shelley—to whose writings Mill himself refers, in distinction from those of Wordsworth, as the poems of a poet.

> "And like a dying lady, lean and pale,
> Who totters forth, wrapt in a gauzy veil,
> Out of her chamber, led by the insane
> And feeble wanderings of her fading brain,
> The moon arose upon the murky earth,
> A white and shapeless mass."

No ground of union exists between the two imaginations in these lines, except a potential congruity of the beholder's emotions. And this dangerous disregard, not merely of practical similarity, but of all the external senses, is characteristic of

great modern poets. Whether their motive be specifically to realize an emotion or not, they continually bring these interior vibrations of the body into a realization, in order to make it full and personal and strong. They continually choose out for a focus the quality or the detail in things that relates them to our vital feeling, and they compare things together upon the basis of similarity in this feeling.

Those jewels in "The Eve of Saint Agnes" must have been full of lustre, a romantic lustre in the moonlight; they must have been richer even than the window-panes, more deep in hue; but for the poet of our hearts they were *warmed* jewels, they could not be more.

Emotion is the surest arbiter of a poetic choice, and it is the priest of all supreme unions in the mind. Let things be ever so kin in a sensuous or objective feature, as blood is to roses, but be the burdens that they carry to the heart opposed, they are precarious consorts. Let these burdens be the same, and it matters not how alien in all else, in space and time irreconciled, in act, in reason antipathetic as the poles, they flow together as if by nature.

> "Not so the eagle, who like thee could scale
> Heaven, and could nourish in the sun's domain
> Her mighty youth with morning, doth complain,

Soaring and screaming round her empty nest,
As Albion wails for thee."

In the face of such evidence and such authority, it is true, however, that emotion is not the essence, nor a definitive feature of poetry. The most practical language—like earnest achievement itself—can awaken the emotions. It is not the existence of these emotions, but our attitude to them, that distinguishes the poetic mood. We wish to experience them for their own sake. And in exactly the same way we wish to experience sensations, or actions, or ideas. It may be that we are not often attracted to experience anything whatever, when it does not contain for us some emotion, some feeling besides the mere attraction or pleasure. But this does not warrant our regarding the emotion as the exclusive object of attraction. It rather counsels us against so sharply separating it from all the other qualities that go to constitute a thing. Probably any theory which regards the laboratory analysis of our experience into emotion, sensation, affection, image, idea, and so forth, as a final truth, will itself prove but temporary. We are safer when we talk of experience as a whole.

Even in so far, however, as we *can* distinguish emotion from other elements in a perception, we can prove that it is not always the object of a

poet's regard. If it were, emotional congruity would invariably characterize poetic comparisons; or at least we should find no comparisons that distinctly violate and destroy emotion. But these we do find in the greatest and most natural poetry. I have in mind the story of the wounding of Menelaus in the Iliad,—the poetic pleasure that is taken in the sharp mark of "purple" on his thigh, taken in brazen defiance of the hero's agony and peril which we felt. This is the idea that the poet associated with his plight:

> "As when some Carian or Maconian dame
> Tinges with purple the white ivory,
> To form a trapping for the cheeks of steeds,—
> And many a horseman covets it, yet still
> It lies within her chamber, to become
> The ornament of some great monarch's steed
> And make its rider proud,—thy shapely thighs,
> Thy legs, and thy fair ankles thus were stained,
> O Menelaus! with thy purple blood."

Here, at least, we can truthfully distinguish sensation from emotion, because sensation leads the comparison in one direction, while emotion would lead it in another. And the poet's fidelity is to the sensation; he loves the pure color. In another passage of the Iliad, equally discordant for the feelings, he is faithful to his sense of sound. The shouting onslaught of armed hosts of war is compared to the clamors of a flock of sheep.

The truth is that a poet's associations will depend, like those of his readers, upon that undefinitive and incalculable thing, his personal interest. If he happens to love color and love horses, and if we do, and we are in no hurry, then it is poetic that we should pause and recall to observation that Carian maiden—her own arms stained with the crying purple too—and consider the *illustrious* steed the work of such an artist must be reserved for. Let Menelaus bleed—we must see the horse!

Emotional choice and comparison are not distinctive of poetry from practical language, but they are in a certain degree distinctive of modern from ancient poetry. Only, indeed, by making this general distinction between the inner and the outer feelings, can we fully explain the lightness, the breadth, and health of early poets. Their choices are less personal, their comparisons more often purely sensuous, than ours. They are comparisons in shape, size, color, attitude, texture, motion—comparisons which seem very wide to us, because they hold things together which are not, and cannot be, blended deep in the crucible of the heart's passions.

"Thy hair is as a flock of goats
That lies along the side of Mount Gilead.
Thy teeth are like a flock of sheep that are newly shorn,

Which are come up from the washing;
Whereof every one has twins,
And none is bereaved among them."

We find also that early poets are more idle in their comparisons, less rich in metaphor, more given to the long simile, more given to the reduplication of similes, and to that simile that we have called *discursive*, because our enjoyment wanders in it away from the subject which it was to illumine, and we find ourselves in a different part of the world. Indeed, they do not always care to what object their comparisons are attached, and they repeat them like a refrain. I believe that all these characteristics of the poetry of the ancients can be comprised in the statement that it is more purely poetic, more purely childlike, and willing to love, than the poetry of later people. Having a less complex environment to which they must adapt themselves, and being irresponsible in their minds to a mature and austere science, they were habitually more free to enjoy all qualities of being. They required no profound organic disturbance, no hushed and tremulous utterance, to sanction their engaging in the enjoyment of poetry. They were ready at any time to suspend business and make an excursion into the world. Their love was free.

Theocritus begins in this sweetly wandering language a lyric which he calls "passionate":

"Hast thou come, dear youth, with the third night and the dawning; hast thou come? but men in longing grow old in a day! As spring than the winter is sweeter, as the apple than the sloe, as the ewe is deeper of fleece than the lamb she bore; as a maiden surpasses a thrice-wedded wife, as the fawn is nimbler than the calf; nay, by as much as sweetest of all fowls sings the clear-voiced nightingale, so much has thy coming gladdened me! To thee have I hastened as the traveller hastens under the burning sun to the shadow of the ilex tree."

We take delight in this free-hearted poetry as we might in the rippling of a stream where it spreads out among little stones. We take delight, thinking of it as something unusual and refreshing. But for ourselves, in our own world, we have all too little of it. We feel that the poetic attitude is not quite allowable in maturity, except when demanded by a deepening of the passions. And this is very unfortunate; because it makes people who have not deep passions and yet are poets, feel compelled to simulate the language of exaltation, and construct studious verses out of strange, intense-sounding words, when they might sit down and write a little natural poetry with no great exhaustion, if we would only expect it of them.

With this tyranny of the inward feelings which

culture, or self-consciousness, or just time itself has begotten, the loss has been far greater than the gain. For while we have hardly the tendency to enjoy—except as antique, or after we have named it "pastoral"—such an address of a lover to his beloved as these we quoted from Theocritus and the Song of Songs, still the writers of such poems did have the power we have of being deep and swift and true only to their passions. There are hymns of the ancient religions in which these wanderings are not possible, because the ecstasy has utter dominion. And even Theocritus, the poet of a pasture-land, has made as intense a lyric of impassioned love—save only the lost remembered songs of Sappho—as the world has record of. He has made also the high model for all songs of tears, the model upon which Milton formed his lament for Lycidas, and Shelley the poem "Adonais," which he deemed his greatest, and which is perhaps the most sublime and conquering expression of sorrow in the world.

Both early and late it appears that sorrow is the great mother of poetry. It is most fertile of all those streams of feeling out of which high realizations of the world arise, and which they seek to make eternal. America has not been rich in poems that are supreme, but she has risen in sorrow to the heights of language. Her poet

Bryant is said to have grown up within view of a rural grave-yard; a circumstance that can alone explain his writing at the age of eighteen that final poem of the thought of death, and never again, save for a few re-echoing lines, a syllable of great poetry. "Thanatopsis" is a courageous realization of death. "When Lilacs Last in the Dooryard Bloomed," another universal poem of America, is a passionate realization of death. The fragments of Edgar Allan Poe are all mystical echoes of the beauty of death, or the death of beauty. We cannot write the theory of emotional realization without recalling some songs of love and sorrow. And with them we may well cease writing the theory. We may well ascend to the truth which is no theory in the poems themselves —"Lycidas," "Adonais," "Thanatopsis," "When Lilacs Last in the Dooryard Bloomed"—poems that not only realize, but elevate, and make perfect for us that universal sorrow of which only the very love of life's experience, pure poetry, can ever melt or mitigate the sting.

## CHAPTER XI

## REALIZATION OF IDEAS

Persons of intellectual rather than sensuous nature, persons who can say with the philosopher, "I do not mind a blow, sir,—nothing affects me but an abstract idea!"—will not think that all the talk about realization of action and word-painting and the enjoyment of emotion, comes very near to the heart of poetry. For they too have their definition, which is an expression of their taste. They think that the essence of poetry is to be found in its manner of expressing ideas or abstract judgments. And these it expresses in two ways—either by means of a symbol, or by means of a concrete example. "All is vanity," saith the preacher, and the poet adds "a striving after wind." "The shortest distance between two points," says the geometer. "As the crow flies," "a bee line," says the poet. And these ways of speaking are surely distinctive of him. But we need not be surprised to find that they only illustrate in the intellectual world, those same two acts of choice and comparison which we have observed in the world of things, and that the poet's attitude to an idea is but a part of that

attitude toward all being which we have ascribed to him. He loves the idea, as he loves the thing, not for its meaning, its indication into the future, but for itself, its content in the present. He wishes to realize the nature of that. And he does so, either by choosing among all the particulars suggested by the idea, one which can bear the whole flavor of its significance, or by comparing with the idea some being that is wholly outside its significance, but similar to it.

Suppose that the idea be *silence*. "The butterfly sleeps on the village bell," is a poem of this idea, a realization by means of the concrete particular. Or suppose the idea be *that our sins shall be forgiven*. We have for this an enduring symbol, a symbol so strong in native poetry that it begot rhythm in the heart of the translator:

> "Though your sins be as scarlet,
> They shall be as white as snow;
> Though they be red like crimson,
> They shall be as wool."

Thus to show forth in earthen dyes the thoughts of a spirit, to make what is ideal and impalpable assail the senses of the flesh, has seemed to some the high, and to some the low, essential service of poetry.

It has seemed high, because it makes ideas warm, and acceptable to those who can hardly

enjoy them in a purer form. It colors and popularizes the life of meditation. We are not all capable of that intellectual love which is the invisible support of the philosopher's austerity. We must have in our ideas an admixture of the corporeal, before they appear to us a natural object for affection. I suppose that Immanuel Kant, who is the master of an intolerable prose, had within himself a more consuming passion for the process of thought than Ralph Waldo Emerson. But he could not make thoughts lovable to the people, because he gave them no body. Emerson was perhaps not the greatest creative thinker, but he was a great lover of the experience of thought, and a creator of that experience and that love for others.

Let us compare, as examples of the extremes of poetry and its opposite in the world of ideas, his statement that

"Man is the façade of a temple,"

with this sentence from Kant which deals, for all we know, with somewhat the same subject-matter:

"Now, as in order to cognize ourselves, in addition to the act of thinking, which subjects the manifold of every possible intuition to the unity of apperception, there is necessary a determinate mode of intuition, whereby this manifold is given; although my own existence is certainly not mere phænomenon (much less mere illusion), the deter-

mination of my existence can only take place conformably to the form of the internal sense, according to the particular mode in which the manifold which I conjoin is given in internal intuition, and I have therefore no knowledge of myself as I am, but merely as I appear to myself."

These heights of metaphysical abstraction are obviously inaccessible to those who have something else to attend to, and yet there is a joy in being up there, as the existence of the book and all its arduous commentators attest. And I believe it is a joy not altogether different from that which Emerson extends us. For philosophy, even self-mutilated as it is by the wish to be also a science, is more truly, or more generally, a realization of the full nature of those ideas that are the technique of science. Emerson, with his serene genius of expression, perfected this realization. And he has thus had a more direct and wider influence upon lives of the nineteenth century, than the acceptance of any theory or doctrine can register. He has filled them with a high experience. He is —as he always quietly felt himself to be, in spite of the failings of his verse—essentially a poet. He is the poet of philosophic ideas.

By some minds this descent from what is called the "abstract rationality" of a concept into that world of accident and multiplicity whence it rose, has not been considered a high experience. To

the unhealthy morality of mediæval sainthood it was a positive evil. Together with all things that wear the colors of material existence, poetry was dismissed in those days as a temptation to the soul. It was named—with a stroke of poetic genius which must itself have appeared supremely sinful—"The Wine of the Devil." But even before and since then, by scientists and philosophers as well as by priests, it has been held that the highest attainment of the human spirit is the process of thought unadulterated with any recollection of sensuous life. Tradition reports that Democritus blinded himself for the sake of intellectual culture, and even so sensuous a Platonist as Shelley declared that "the deep truth is imageless." And so it has always seemed that, even though there be nothing sinful in the material symbol, there is at least something immature in depending upon it. With the cultivation of intellect, language has risen slowly away from the particulars, until now the names commonly used only designate, as with a wave of the hand in their direction, vast classes and common qualities of things. And this power of general designation is so vital to what we call civilization, that it cannot but appear retrogressive and primitive to be perpetually descending to the particulars, perpetually remembering individuals, perpetually specify-

ing and symbolizing what is already understood by the mind.

It is primitive. Poetry is of necessity the language both of children who do not understand the general names of things, and savages who have not decided upon those names. The speech of uncivilized people is full of irrelevant specifications. They continually say such things as *red dog, white dog, curly dog, fat dog,* not because they wish to convey an impression, but because they cannot help it, they have no word for *dog in general.* The Cherokee Indians are without any verb meaning *to wash,* but they have verbs meaning *wash my head, wash another person's head, wash my face, wash my clothes, wash dishes, wash a child.* And this feature of early language is not due to the predominance in its originators of a poetic instinct; it is due to the fact that language arose, not in general reflection, but in particular experiences. The first words would naturally be names of special things. Probably most of them were proper names, the most special of all—names of but one object in the world. And whenever such names are extended to include a whole class of objects, the act, however practical in its author, appears poetic to us because we have a name for the class itself. When we call certain kinds of people *Judases,* we do so for the sake of vividness;

but if we had no term *traitor*, we should be compelled to do so whether we wished to be vivid or not. And that is a frequent position of the savage.

Besides the significant use of examples, his speech is full of elaborate symbolism. And this, too, can frequently be traced to his lack of an abstract term. Let us imagine that a Navajo Indian has no such concept in his knowledge as *patience*, yet one day it comes to him in a vague meditation that the Moqui tribe, peaceable though they be, are not altogether contemptible. "Moqui is—" how shall he say it? How shall he express that notion that comes so easily to our tongues? "Moqui *sits down happy*," perhaps,—and to the civilized translator this will be a most poetic idea. But imagine further that after a week or two of reflecting upon it he decides that *to sit down happy* is a good thing! He wishes to express that too, but he has no such general term as *good*. He has *good hunting*, *good fire-building*, *good fighting*, but the idea of virtue in the abstract has never yet entered his speech. What shall he say? "*Sit-down-happy* is *good-fighting*," let us imagine! And that is still more poetic. What quality or real flavor, indeed, has our own proverb —*Patience is a virtue*—until you discover the military origins of the last word, which give it the

power of a symbolic realization?—Patience is a good fight!

Such poetry, not consciously created, but a by-product of the growth of generality and abstraction, is rife among all uncivilized peoples.[1] And, moreover, their singing and their speaking are not so separate in their lives as ours, and their passions not so subjected to the time and place, and there is therefore a continual poetry in living among them. It is not unlike the poetry of advancing science, the poetry of any mind that gropes beyond the confines of its present vocabulary.

The Persians have many anecdotes of the first appearance of poetry in their literary heroes, and one of them astutely attributes it to the young man's ignorance of technical terminology.

[1] I do not mean to imply that savages are not also intentionally poetic—more frequently and more purely so, perhaps, than we are. I do not know. But I know it is a profound error to suppose, because of these characteristics of primitive language, and their survival in Homeric and other early poetic dialects, that as language develops in the power of expressing abstract ideas true poetry becomes less natural or less possible. True poetry, arising from the pure poetic wish, only becomes more clearly distinguished from accidental poetry, arising from the quest of information. It is just as possible to specify, it is just as possible to symbolize, as it ever was. Indeed, the resources for symbolism are richer than ever, for one abstract idea can now stand for another, or for a concrete thing. Only it is not so often necessary, and so the power is less cultivated among practical people. Poetry is left for the truly poetic.

"The celebrated Abderrahman, son of Hissân, having, when a child, been stung by a wasp, the insect being one he did not recognize, he ran to his father, crying out that 'he had been wounded by a creature spotted with yellow and white, like the border of his vest.' On hearing these words uttered in a measure of Arabian verse, as elegant as natural, Hissân became aware of his son's genius for poetry."

To attribute to it the origin of great poetry, is paying too high a compliment even to so valuable a thing as ignorance. But that there is a certain antithesis between poetry and general knowledge, and that poetry exists either before that is acquired or after it is surmounted, let us gladly acknowledge. Leaving out the accident of metre, we could discover these origins of poetry every day in the kindergarten. A little boy is trying to guess the name of his teacher's friend, and not having in his mind the name of the general concept *first*, he asks, "What is the letter that lives on the edge of it?" Another conveys his abstract notion of *height* in the words, "Nearest the sky."

We shall not impugn the genuineness of the poetry of children, nor that purity of their poetic love which we have insisted upon, we shall but strengthen the force of that insistence, if we also acknowledge that their poetry of ideas is frequently but a happy incident of ignorance. We might call it necessary poetry. The most prac-

tical adults are driven to it when by a reversal of circumstances, the general name being given, they are called upon to explain its meaning to one who is still in the primitive condition. They have either to recall particulars or to employ symbols. There is no escaping the picturesque. I find this memorandum of a bit of such instruction in the early diary of Helen Keller:

"Nancy was cross. Cross is cry and kick."

Now, if we could arrange so that all the children of the world should become teachers of the adults, telling them how to turn their talking into poetry, we should find exactly such memoranda in the note-books of the pupils. They would be taught that, "Cross is *cry and kick*." But in language, as in life, the prejudice prevails that instruction should pass in the other direction. The jewels of childhood's utterance are adventitious; the chief end of man is to acquire sagacity in the use of general concepts; his chief end is to be sensible or scientific.

In scientific thinking, we trim away from every experience all that makes it individual and astonishing, in order that we may give it a common name and establish it in a familiar class. Science deals with each reality as city people deal with a merchant, neglecting for a supreme expedience

all that is of unique and immediate value in the relation established. It regards only the sameness of things. In books of science we get no taste of a particular existence, but things having some important similarity are referred to as though they were all exactly alike, and by a word stripped of every appropriateness to their nature, stripped of all individual quality whatever, save what is essential to distinguish it from other words. The culmination of this process is to abandon words altogether, as savoring too much of a reality, and let *a* stand for one concept, and *b* for another. Algebra is the extreme antithesis of poetry—so complete in its practical idealism that the real existence of various things is not even intimated as possible, but we deal only with terms and their relations in the mind, the last vestige of poetry sucked out of them. This is the true end and climax, not only of what we call pure science, but of that abstract intellectuality which the philosopher praises. It is an idealization of the practical uniformities of experience—a process which advances with such marvellous rapidity, especially in the absence of experience, that if we remain in our studies, we can be led to believe that all the world may one day be summed up in a single formula, and the perfection of science achieved.

By that time we shall need to remember that

the world does not exist in the abstract, nor in general, nor in any classification, but in concrete and heterogeneous detail. The poet reminds us of this. Poetry is a countryman, and greets every experience by its own name. Books of poetry, no matter how abstract or general the ideas they convey, are filled with presences. Things are made to appear before us in rich multiplicity, and by words cunningly apposite to their unique characters, amid which the general meaning must find expression as it can. And no matter what that meaning may be, no matter how intellectual or how scientific his thesis, the poet is by his very speech engaged in exploiting against the spirit of science the varieties of the world. And as the extreme of science is the vanishing up of all generalization in a single truth, so the extreme of poetry is to descend from the generality proper to the very existence of language, and engage in the diversities of life. Poetry ushers us out of the library. It is a gesture toward the world.

And thus it is that, although primitive, poetry is also divine. It is a redeemer of the mind from the serious madness of abstraction. It is "the breath and finer spirit of all knowledge," as Wordsworth said; it is "the tuft and final applause of science," as Whitman said; not because it goes still higher up into the air than science and knowl-

edge, but because it carries science and knowledge continually back into the specific realities out of which they arose, and whose illumination is their culminating function.

And yet this, too, we should remember—lest we be as foolish as the fools of science—that abstract ideas themselves exist, and are among the realities of experience. The realization of ideas is a part of the adventure of being. And a poet dwells upon the symbolic image, not merely because it is warmer than the idea, but also because it is the essence of the idea in so far as that has any substantive existence. The meaning is transitive, it is an act of the mind; there is no pausing upon it alone. But the image in which it dwells, and which it hallows with new feelings that are offspring of the power of generalization—that is a thing that can be raised up, and seen, and dwelt upon for its own sake. Through that, and through that alone, the poet can arrest and entertain a thought.

"Now, while the birds thus sing a joyous song,
And while the young lambs bound
As to the tabor's sound,
To me alone there came a thought of grief:

. . . . . .

"Our birth is but a sleep and a forgetting:
The Soul that rises with us, our life's Star,

Hath had elsewhere its setting,
And cometh from afar:
Not in entire forgetfulness,
And not in utter nakedness,
But trailing clouds of glory do we come
From God, who is our home."

This was not a new thought, nor was the proof offered of it convincing even in its own day; but it was the new realization of a thought as old as man, and dear to him. It was the bringing down of abstract immortality into the world of things and passions where it might be touched and felt. The day was long gone by when a philosopher could astonish men with the idea that our mind in childhood brings proof of some migration from a higher sphere. Plato thought in a far more scientific way of this. But the day was not gone by and never will be, when a poet could astonish us with the vision of this thought in robes of color and emotion.

"Trailing clouds of glory do we come!"

We consider such symbolic or visionary thinking to be very rare, and that a special star attends the birth of a poet. But no doubt these fires of imagery play in the firmament of every mind. It is not without initial effort that we learn to disregard them. Present to your mind, if you can, some naked meaning. Let it be that contained

in the word *junction*. Unless you are content with the mere sound or appearance of the word itself as a bearer of the meaning, you will find in your imagination a vague picture of two things coming together, two undefined objects whose very lack of definition shall represent the generality of the idea. And if your mind is feverish, or electric with passion, the picture will be more defined. There will even appear a particular instance (perhaps that one in which you first learned the word), and this will stand for *junction* in the abstract, until a new concrete is given by the completion of a sentence. "Let there be a junction between your ideals and your daily life." Yet even here we are at a loss to attain a clear image, for the words *ideal*, and *daily life*, are also highly general. Something above reaches down upon something below, something light touches upon something drab-colored, or a vagueness from heaven swims over the picture of ourselves in practical costume —the difference depending upon how we have learned and used the word *ideal*, and the word *junction*, and the words *daily life*. Whatever form it takes, it is inevitably vague and unemerging—unsatisfying, because it leaves us all of the pictorial work to do. It is "prosaic." "Hitch your wagon to a star"—that is poetic. It gleams into the mind, scorning all three of those old words

that were obscure and not compatible with each other, putting in their place one visual experience which abides. Poetry but dwells upon and perfects that significant imagery which is the natural instrument of all thinking. It perfects the individual nature of the idea.

And the poignancy of an idea so perfected is usually greatest when the image stands alone, when the meaning in its more abstract form is not expressed. We are given only the specific and concrete, yet with some shadowed intimation that it contains more than itself.

> "The Moving Finger writes; and, having writ,
> Moves on: nor all your Piety nor Wit
> Shall lure it back to cancel half a Line,
> Nor all your Tears wash out a Word of it."

We cross the bridge of comparison by ourselves, and hardly with words. We only inwardly feel that we have arrived in the presence of an idea. And so unique and magical is this, the experience through speech of what is unspoken, so wonderfully does it float and linger through the lines of all ideal poetry, that it has seemed to those who love above all things a miracle to be a kind of essence of the poetic quality. They, too, have wished to confine all poetry within the limits of their love. "Suggestion"—"intimation"—"nuance"—"meaning," in the occult sense—are what

they wait for, and sail over the great seas of open poetry thinking they are but a passage-way for these vessels of mystery.

Let us acknowledge that though poetry is far wider and far more than they believe, yet this is among the sublimest of her powers. For we are sometimes led by her most fine suggestions, not only into the presence of ideas, but into the presence of what is beyond any idea. We are made to apprehend the being of things the mind cannot contain. In trigonometry, because we know the relation between two lines, we can measure the one which is beyond the span of our instruments, and we nail our diagrams to the stars; and in poetry, likewise, when we have experienced the reference of a present image to absent ones, we are awake to those references which pass beyond our minds, and we catch them on their way to the images that are eternally absent. There is poetry that runs along the verge of infinity. Repeatedly we span the universe by the juxtaposition of words, and as the architecture of these successive visions is piled before us, we are led almost to expect a revelation of the unseen. This power has hung the veil of sacredness upon the name of poetry—that with these written syllables it can so bring over us the nearness of infinite and universal being.

Some shadow of this enduring wonder must

have dwelt above all those bright gods of Greece, who were the children of the love of pure ideas. Realizations in that warmest symbol, personality, of the ideas of health, and courage, and wisdom, and some unnamable great beauty that was supposed to lie beyond them all—they dwelt like light among the citizens of Athens. And in the darkness of declining faith in their true being, there arose one who declared that though they fade, the symbols fade, the ideas abide forever and are real. Health and beauty and lightness, these abstract things, exist in perfection and can be seen, if not with the sensual eye, yet with the eye of the mind. So Plato's evening prayer was a prayer not to the deities, not to the beautiful and good, but to beauty and goodness. He sought to substitute the image of a word with its meaning, for the image of a god with his meaning, and so preserve for a little longer the high-hearted joys of a young religion. But he too failed, and died. The gods must all perish and be lost to us, until we have grown old enough in science to return to them and know that they are poetry, the symbols of ideas and of a universal mystery.

## CHAPTER XII

## POETRY ITSELF

Poetry is not only a realization of things, but it is also a thing itself. It contains present elements to realize and make perfect, or make poignant, for their own sake. Perhaps the finest of all these elements, the most magnetic to those who love life, is a great conflict. The spontaneous pulse of the speech is fighting the restraint of rhythm perpetually, and in the clash both are exalted. In some poems the established rhythm triumphs often; in others it is often wrecked. And they who value generality and law for their own sake, will favor the first kind of poems, and they who value the general law only as an opportunity for individual rebellion, will favor the second kind. This difference will always be. But for either of them to get the real food for his taste, it is necessary that both the rhythm and the spontaneous pulse should exist, that they should exist distinctly, that they should continue in that state of warring equilibrium which seems to define the very nature of existence.

Those who love liberty will enjoy this conflict

as it fares in the blank verse of Shakespeare's mature years; those who love the established order will be better pleased with Tennyson. But even Tennyson cannot allow the order to prevail for many lines unbroken, as a quotation will reveal.

> "So saying, from the ruin'd shrine he stept
> And in the moon athwart the place of tombs,
> Where lay the mighty bones of ancient men,
> Old knights, and over them the sea-wind sang
> Shrill, chill, with flakes of foam. He, stepping down
> By zig-zag paths, and juts of pointed rock,
> Came on the shining levels of the lake.
> There drew he forth the brand Excalibur,
> And o'er him, drawing it, the winter moon,
> Brightening the skirts of a long cloud, ran forth
> And sparkled keen with frost against the hilt——"

There are three variances in these lines against the formal rhythm:

> "Shrill, chill, with flakes of foam,"

and

> "Brightening the skirts of a long cloud,"

and

> "Came on the shining levels of the lake."

And one might insert for *brightening the skirts of a long cloud,* the words, *illumining the skirts of trailing cloud,* and for *shrill, chill,* the words *all shrill,* and for *came on,* the word *beheld,* which would restore the rhythm to complete regularity; and by so mutilating a perfect thing he might see, if

he cared to, how greatly its perfection depends upon a conflict.

Another element of poetry, as a thing itself, is that melody of letters on the lips and tongue —a melody less high and startling perhaps, but just as clear and eminent to those whose senses can discriminate with fineness as the clang of horns and cymbals. I call it melody because it gives no sounds in unison, but otherwise it has upon an elfin scale the whole diversity of symphonic music. It has a cadence that is almost formal melody; it has the change of tempo and intensity; it has a lineal euphony and dissonance of tonal qualities. Each vowel is an instrument, and each consonant a kind of stop. And all these stops and instruments can be conjoined in myriads of the ways of pleasing that we call beauty—more ways, indeed, than those of instrumental music. For it is not to the ear only, but to the sentient organs of articulation, and even to the eye, that the lettered syllables of poetry give music. Phrases, lines, and stanzas have each a distinct being, and all these beings can be built up together congruously into an architectural wonder.

In modern days, indeed, this building up of vocal wonders has become a great part of the art of writing poetry. Tennyson gave much of his creative attention to it. And it was truly a

wonder that he built—a supremely soft, mellifluous wonder—

> "Music that gentlier on the spirit lies,
> Than tired eyelids upon tired eyes."

Sidney Lanier also loved this art, and wrote a science of it, and even exceeded Tennyson, if not in the melting away, at least in the intense sweetness of the linking of his syllables. They hardly allow themselves to be forgotten, they fall so velvetly out of the mouth with rhyme, alliteration, assonance, and every shade of conscious euphony. But of all the builders of the lingual melody, Edgar Allan Poe seems to have given it the least divided regard, and in the few perfected poems that he made, brought it to an extreme of limpid fluidity.

> "At midnight, in the month of June,
> I stand beneath the mystic moon.
> An opiate vapor, dewy, dim,
> Exhales from out her golden rim,
> And, softly dripping, drop by drop,
> Upon the quiet mountain top,
> Steals drowsily and musically
> Into the universal valley.
> The rosemary nods upon the grave;
> The lily lolls upon the wave;
> Wrapping the fog about its breast,
> The ruin moulders into rest;
> Looking like Lethe, see! the lake
> A conscious slumber seems to take,

> And would not, for the world, awake.
> All Beauty sleeps!—and lo! where lies
> Irene, with her Destinies!"

Rudyard Kipling injected into this art a more heroic ring. His syllables raise a magnificent clangor that puts health into the pulse, and their sounding marks quite a crisis in the history of the music of English letters. "The ringing, stinging spindrift, and fulmar flying free!" seem hardly of the same genus as "The velvet violet cushions," and "The silken, sad, uncertain rustling of each purple curtain." Yet after all they are only a variation of taste in the same field of interest. They direct the attention, more or less explicitly, as Tennyson so often did, to the vocal materials of verse.

Poetry contains more essence of its own, however, than syllables and letters, or the wonders made of them. It contains words. And of all the jewels of Africa there is no one that can surpass, in concentration of intense being, a unique word. Suspend before the mind, but only for a moment lest its spirit flee, a word—the word *wraith*, or *vigil*, or *night-wandering*. *Ingot*, *waternixy*, *preen*, *simoom*—are they not wonderful creatures? They bear all the charmed diversities of nature in a faery world. No poet ever lived, no vivid-minded child, but loved to know them.

And knowing them—or shall we call it tasting, feeling of them, loving to build them also into wonders—has been a second great part of the art of poetry in modern days. Consider, for example, those lines "To a Snow-flake," by Francis Thompson. Consider them, not because they lack all other poetry, but because they lack all other greatness in poetry, than the greatness of a creation in the flavors of words. A sensuous if delicate cloud is hung before us, hiding the snow-flake, or even the God, we may have thought of, but hiding it in order to ravish us away with a mystery of names. As a builder of these magic clouds, dwelling upon them forever, and even to the ruin of his melody and rhythm, Francis Thompson has hardly been excelled.

TO A SNOW-FLAKE

"What heart could have thought you?—
Past our devisal
(A filigree petal!)
Fashioned so purely,
Fragilely, surely,
From what Paradisal
Imagineless metal,
Too costly for cost?
Who hammered you, wrought you,
From argentine vapor?—
'God was my shaper.
Passing surmisal,
He hammered, He wrought me.

From curled silver vapor,
To lust of his mind:—
Thou could'st not have thought me!
So purely, so palely,
Tinily, surely,
Mightily, frailly,
Insculped and embossed,
With his hammer of mind,
And his graver of frost.' "

The poem is so moving, and yet withal so inevitable—so superior in that quality to others in its volume—that we might almost retract what we said of it. We might say, for one thing, that there is a kinship between the sensible nature of its words and of the thing they speak of. Both do curl and flutter, even if not in the same unconscious purity. And in so far as that is true, there is a higher poetry than lies in the mere realization of words. It is a poetry upon the borderland between word-conjuring and the imaginative realization of things—a special poetry to which the text-books have given the longest and most unpoetic name of *onomatopœia*.

This poetry contains similarity, but it is a similarity not between two things that are named, but between a thing and the very naming of it. *Buzz, bang, slap, grumble*, are words used to illustrate this, and they are always supplemented by these long-suffering lines of Tennyson:

"The moan of doves in immemorial elms,
And murmuring of innumerable bees."

No book about poetry is acceptable without a quotation of these lines; and few books about poetry fail to convey an indistinct impression that they contain the real, or at least the only seizable, quintessence of poetic language. This is unfortunate, because the lines are obviously unusual and had to be sought after, and we should not care to hear a great many like them even if we could. But, unfortunate though it is, it is the nearest that the text-books ever come to telling the truth about poetic language. It is a real intuition of the truth, and far less misleading than what they have to say about "figures of speech" in general.

The reason why the text-books talk about onomatopœia as though it were the quintessence of poetry, is that their authors understand its poetic value, but they do not understand the poetic value of the other figures. They perceive, in an obscure way, that making an absent experience vivid to the mind is the very magic of poetry. And they can explain to themselves how an imitative sound makes an absent thing vivid. It is like saying "bow-wow" for baby at the word *dog*. But how the choice of a salient detail, or the comparison of one absent thing with another, makes

it vivid to the mind, they cannot explain. And so they pass over these greater acts of poetry somewhat abstractedly, as we have seen, and they dwell upon this small incident of mimicry and these misfortunate two lines of Tennyson, as though they were a kind of special archetype for all poetry, and were achieved by a supernatural union of the poet himself with the objects he loves. But we need only glance back a little way in the same poem to prove to ourselves how much more utterly lost in his objects a poet may become, and yet make no sensible imitation whatever.

"But cease to move so near the Heavens, and cease
To glide a sunbeam by the blasted Pine,
To sit a star upon the sparkling spire;
And come, for Love is of the valley, come,
For Love is of the valley, come thou down
And find him; by the happy threshold, he,
Or hand in hand with Plenty in the maize,
Or red with spirted purple of the vats,
Or foxlike in the vine; nor cares to walk
With Death and Morning on the silver horns,—

. . . . . .

"But follow; let the torrent dance thee down
To find him in the valley; let the wild
Lean-headed eagles yelp alone, and leave
The monstrous ledges there to slope, and spill
Their thousand wreaths of dangling water-smoke,
That like a broken purpose waste in air:
So waste not thou; but come; for all the vales
Await thee——"

The language of Dante held people in so great awe that a tradition arose, and has survived among the credulous, that a foreigner can understand him to some extent by the very wailing of his words —a tradition which gives more credit to Dante in its folly, than it would if it were true. For how should a man descending into very hell, experiencing the universal horror till his mind was rabid and his bones were gaunt—how should he be attending to the trick of juggling some eight thousand words until they mimicked every noise or object he encountered? It is pardonable that we should speak of Dante with superstition, for he is probably the only man that ever fully went through hell. But I think we do light honor to the superhuman genius in him when we unite it with this magic of the languid study. We unite it with such achievements as Edgar Allan Poe's "Bells"—a poem which shows the love of onomatopœia, and word-tasting, and letter-music, in extreme and almost ludicrous dominance over the motives of universal poetry.

"Hear the sledges with the bells—
Silver bells!
What a world of merriment their melody foretells!
How they tinkle, tinkle, tinkle,
In the icy air of night!
While the stars that oversprinkle
All the heavens, seem to twinkle

With a crystalline delight;
Keeping time, time, time,
In a sort of Runic rhyme,
To the tintinnabulation that so musically wells
From the bells, bells, bells, bells,
Bells, bells, bells—
From the jingling and the tinkling of the bells."

One might almost regard these verses, with "The Raven," as a parody upon the tendencies of chamber-poets in the modern day—their consecration of the sensuous materials of language. It is but a step beyond them in affection for the palpable, to devote the energies of creation—as at one time the poets of Persia did—to beautiful penmanship, and the coloring of the pages, and dusting them with live perfumes.

The poets of the world have not been dominated by any of these passions of the writing-room. For them poetry itself is an experience subordinate to those which it portrays. They have mastered the art of verbal melody much as they mastered the art of handwriting, in order to subject it utterly to the service of the imaginative realization of life. The pleasure in their syllables does not protest itself; the perfection of their utterance is supreme, but it is in the truest sense a negative perfection. It is but the clear medium through which a greater thing continually appears.

Two elements belong to poetry as a thing itself,

however, upon which even the great poets have sometimes concentrated their best energy. They are the form, an intellectual element, and the unique emotion that words aloof from things can sometimes generate. I quote for illustration of the first a sonnet whose excellence, whatever elements of passion it may hold, is not separable from its totality. The passion and its images are wrought together on a rhythmic pattern into a high unity that becomes a being for the intellect—a poem.

"REMEMBER

"Remember me when I am gone away,
Gone far away into the silent land;
When you can no more hold me by the hand,
Nor I half turn to go yet turning stay.
Remember me when no more, day by day,
You tell me of our future that you planned:
Only remember me; you understand.
It will be late to counsel then or pray.
Yet if you should forget me for a while
And afterwards remember, do not grieve;
For if the darkness and corruption leave
A vestige of the thoughts that once I had,
Better by far you should forget and smile
Than that you should remember and be sad."

Thus to engender without loss of passion or simplicity a perfect form, is an art which somehow stirs in us a greater admiration than does the mere music made of syllables. It is at least a more

complete creation. A poem as a form is a new thing that language adds outright to what the world contained.

Perhaps to create out of the materials of life, by recombining them with names, a feeling that life itself never offered, a quality of passion that is the poem's own, is a still higher art. It seems both high and rare, and to partake of the divineness of nature's own spontaneous generation. And we need not wonder if those who dwell too much in reading and too little in the world, should make a kind of idol of this power and almost wish to call no other utterance poetry.

"I saw pale kings, and princes too,
Pale warriors, death-pale were they all;
. . . . . .

"I saw their starv'd lips in the gloam,
With horrid warning gapèd wide,
And I awoke and found me here
On the cold hillside.

"And this is why I sojourn here
Alone and palely loitering,
Though the sedge is wither'd from the lake,
And no birds sing."

An echo will recall the spell of this sad ballad, and remind us that such magical emotions are indeed a precious gift that words can make to the orig-

inal wealth of life. They are at least a crowning attribute of poetry as a thing itself. And blended with all poignancy and beauty in the other attributes we have too crudely analyzed and separated from each other, they can easily become the object of supreme poetic love in days when art usurps the place of life. They are a culmination of what we may call the poetry of the poet's chamber.

## CHAPTER XIII

## TO ENJOY POETRY

Of all things poetry is most unlike deadness. It is unlike ennui, or sophistication. It is a property of the alert and beating hearts. Those who are so proud that they cannot enter precipitately into the enterprise of being, are too great for poetry. Poetry is unconditionally upon the side of life. But it is also upon the side of variety in life. It is the offspring of a love that has many eyes, as many as the flowers of the field. There is no poetry for him whose look is straitened, and his heart lives but to the satisfaction of a single taste. He had the power of poetry and lost it.

Nor variety alone, but idleness in variety pertains to the poetic life. Greed, anticipation, or the aspiration to achieve may branch a thousand ways. Even old necessity is not monotonous. But poetry cannot flourish where these things absorb the heart. Realization is a flower of leisure and does not blossom quickly. It is a flower of the mood of leisure, and that in these days is the possession of a few. Among the well-to-do it is a traditional possession of women only, and so

poetry has there grown to appear feminine. Among the poor it is unattainable to any but degenerates, or the best rebels, and so poetry appears not to belong there at all, but to be almost an exclusive pleasure of those whom we call cultivated. Poetry has grown aristocratic. It looks into the future for its golden age, the age when it will again be loved by many kinds of people, and rise to its heights upon a wide foundation. They who cherish hopes of poetry will, therefore, do well to favor in their day every assault of labor upon the monopoly of leisure by a few. They will be ready for a drastic re-distribution of the idle hours.

Even a more heroic change they will have to see, if poetry is to prosper in those hours. For with the achievement of leisure as it is to-day, there spreads over the whole nature of man that baleful constraint, the ideal of respectability. And that is a more sure destroyer of poetry, than even necessity or the absorbing ambition that is genuine. The privilege of maintaining a refined insulation from real contacts with the matter of life being possible only to the wealthy, it becomes the accepted token of wealth, and a stern requirement to those whose judgments of merit are determined by a pecuniary standard. They wrap themselves in fabrics and fine manners. They

incase themselves in forms. They touch nothing to the quick. They are even more effectually sundered from the poetry of experience than those considered less fortunate who are occupied with a genuine problem of self-preservation. For they, when they do discover some hour of contemplation, look straight into the face of the world. They taste the sorrows at least. But these others dwell in their mansions of great aspect as in the tomb, forbidden by their ideal the realization even of the tragedy of their own deadness. I walk from Central Park eastward, and as I draw near to those quarters where poverty has kept off this malady, I draw big breaths again, as if I had issued out of a polished museum wherein were kept packages of human remains.

What wonder if the poets, the lovers of the sting of life, have revolted against this voluntary blight. A noble flavor of disreputability clings about the greatest of them. Nor does comedy err in presenting their type as clad in a rolling collar, a flowing tie, or some other symbol of rebellion against the demands of respectable opinion. They do not love these peculiarities for themselves alone, but they love them for the declaration that they make of public liberty for individual existence.

It is true that this revolt in manners cannot

always be brought without a loss of that unconsciousness of self which is so justly valued. But this does not prove that the revolt arose from such consciousness; it proves the all-poisoning power of the ideal revolted against. It but extends to the man who defies it a further challenge. His defiance will not weaken, because it is grounded in the nature of his will. But the strange power of that ideal is grounded in a condition of extreme economic rivalry, and will diminish with a change in this condition. With a wiser distribution, not of leisure only, but of wealth, its tyranny, which is pecuniary at heart, will there rot. And a certain naturalness without respectability, the rarest jewel of our present leisure, will then be more abundant.

It would not be true, perhaps, to attribute all the unexpectedness of the poetic to their revolt against the anxiety or insulation of being respectable. For there is a certain contrariety between custom itself, whatever be the heart of it, and poetry. There is truth in the high opinion that in so far as a man conforms, he ceases to exist. He fails to launch that separate orbit into the sphere of being which the luck of birth allowed him. And, therefore, a divergence for its own sake from the common course receives the poet's sanction. To aspire forever toward the general type is—as

even Plato in his world of thought acknowledged —a kind of death for the individual. The measure of experience is all too short for those who love it.

And if custom, or the typical, appears to them a kind of death, how much the more does individual habit, or the washing out of all acute impressions through mere repetition. This they cannot bear. They cannot settle down to any daily round whatever—to stay at home, or leaving home to cut always across the same meadow. They make new paths at every turn. They shun the clutch of habit as a wild hawk shuns the cage, knowing that it has more power than its bars. It has the power of conquering their wish to leave it. And here that other popular or comic apprehending of the poet's nature—that he is a little unreliable—finds also a measure of justification. He is not the best of neighbors, because you can never tell quite where to find him, or what you may expect of him when found. He is unreliable only in so far as you commit your fortunes rashly to the hope of his repeating yesterday to-day. That mode of living, in so far as mortal tissue and its preservation will allow, he has kept clear of. And in this way, as well as in the way of unsophistication, and variety, and idleness, and the disreputable, and the uncustomary, he has made the

return to childhood. He has preserved the poetry of life.

The poetry of language is secondary to that. It will be found, mixed often with humor, on the tongues of those we have described; its best enjoyment will be known to them. And yet it is a different art, and there are further requisites of its enjoyment. The first and greatest of them is that we should know its character, and estimate it as itself. All lively things of nature, from the planets to ourselves so busy on them, are forever forward-looking, and unconsciously we draw all new things to this company, and judge them as they further or retard its progress. Far more than half our judgments, half our conscious being, half our speaking, is directed toward the future, finds its sanction there. And poetry is exactly otherwise. It aims to step aside from, and to stem, that everlasting process with a strong abiding in the present. And this is foolish mutiny to those who cannot understand; but to those who can, it is a fine rebellion. And that is all the difference.

What silly tassels "figures" can appear, when discourse is conceived as wholly occupied with interchange of meaning, we have seen. A studied row of metrical or rhyming syllables is equally absurd, if it be judged accessory to the convey-

ance of information or conceptual understanding. The entire technique of poetry is rejected with a contemptuous epithet by persons who have never caught the idea, even unconsciously, that there is a difference between the realization of being and the occupation of becoming. From their standpoint, the standpoint of practical sagacity, the statement ascribed to Tolstoy that *nothing was ever said in poetry which could not be better said in plain language*, is entirely true. But from the standpoint of one who wishes to experience the intrinsic nature of a thing spoken of, it is entirely true that *nothing was ever said in plain language which could not be better said in poetry*. When language is essentially practical, too much of the poetic is an intrusion; but when language is essentially poetic, too much of the practical is an intrusion. Whatsoever part of language *is* poetic, moreover, and aims to be so, will be judged and apprehended under the standard of its own aim, or it will not be really judged or apprehended at all.

When the essential difference is once fixed, however, and it is seen how all language parts away on one side or the other, what further relates to the art of enjoying poetry will be quickly understood. It will appear that poetry is not a mere digression, but a parallel of achievement.

It requires the same energy of morning. You cannot sit down in the odd moments and snatch a bite of poetry. There will be words, but the realization will not come. It is the vigorous idleness that is so rare. And once it is attained, a child-like vividness of speech is almost inevitable, and the poetry of books rings wholly true. All those inconsequent details and qualities, those self-significant comparisons, those throbbing syllables, come like an inspiration to the mind. Their stirring and sustaining of pure consciousness exalts us. And the power of lingering, forgotten since the nursery picture-books were closed, returns, and these the picture-books of our maturity grow vivid with the colors of the world.

The power of lingering with energy—this is the second lesson in the art of loving poetry. The third, if we may steal a word from those who teach the love of God, is faith. For poetry is like religion in that it exists with glorious definition for those who have attained it, but for those who merely look upon it, there is little that appears. I believe that if we were to examine the whole field of poetry, from the first corybantic festival to the last polished rondel of a French artist, for some common characteristic *in the words themselves*, whereby the essence of poetry should be indicated, we should find one such characteristic

and one only. It would not be rhythm. It would be the employment of certain particles of emotion or address which are wholly foreign to the speech of ordinary communication. The *Ahs,* and *Thou's,* and the *Forevermores,* seem to be more universal in the language of realization than any other audible or visible thing. And are they not a result of the wish to establish a separation of the poetic moment, to beget in the hearer a change, a reverence, a kind of submission to the magic that invests the poet—a magic that will not exist for him until he yields? The trance of realization is a definite experience. It would be praised by many that are scornful, if they but knew it, this sacred charm that can swing down into the most wretched lives or circumstances and illumine them. And if we dwell upon its kinship with a vision or a waking sleep, let this not suggest unhealth, or unreality, or anything occult, for it is natural as laughter. Only let it give a doubt to those who now dismiss the poetry of rhythmic language from the things of their enjoyment before they ever have experienced it.

The surest path to its experience, if they should humbly wish to know, lies not through reading, but through making it. Better than faith or cherished idleness, better even than understanding poetry as a way to learn the enjoyment of it—

and that without alienation from the better poem of one's own existence—is to create it for one's self. Let but a rhythmic utterance with the chosen name rise in some deep or vivid moment of our own experience, and the rhythms and designations of great poetry are then forever natural. We are of their kindred, and their speech is native to our minds.

## CHAPTER XIV

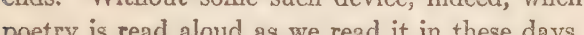
## TO COMPOSE POETRY

The knowledge needed to create an English rhythm, the only general knowledge there is upon that subject, may be acquired while one converses about it. There may be different ways of systemizing this knowledge, but one which flows from our hypothesis about the waves, appears the most simple. Rhythm, according to that hypothesis, must be a repetition of similar effects at approximately equal intervals; and the similar effects repeated in poetry are, in the first place, *lines*, and in the second place, *surges of emphasis* within the lines.

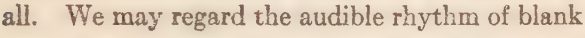
Both lines, or short utterances separated by a pause, and the surges of emphasis within them, are found in primitive chants; therefore neither can be regarded as the more original unit. Poetic rhythm is almost universally a combination of the two, and its chief varieties arise from this fact. Nevertheless, the line has been simply taken for granted by most prosodists, as though it were tied across the page before the poet came there, and his verses were various ways of stringing syllables upon it. This is due, I suppose, to the fact that

the line rhythm is *visible* to a reader, whereas the rhythm of emphasis is only audible, or to be felt in the motions of articulation. But whatever may be the cause, it is a basic error, and the great reason, I believe, why no clear account of the nature of poetic rhythm has ever been given.

The recurrence of lines is often accentuated by placing rhymed syllables in a regular order at the ends. Without some such device, indeed, when poetry is read aloud as we read it in these days, the existence of lines is hardly to be detected at all. We may regard the audible rhythm of blank verse as almost purely accentual, and represent it by a single series of waves.



The incurrence of rhyme in this series might then be represented as scientists represent any merging of commensurable undulations, thus:



This strong intensifying of the line series arises naturally, I believe, only in poetry that is especially exciting. Milton was doubtless right in declaring it to be a troublesome bondage in the labor of composing or reading a work, part poem and part treatise, like "Paradise Lost." But as a general dogma he has reduced his own statement to

absurdity by writing greater poetry with rhyme inevitable. Rhyme reduplicates the metric pulse when feeling runs strong, as insuppressibly as a dancing darky begins to clap his hands with every so many clicks of his flying feet. A similar reduplication may be, and has been, accomplished in poetry by other means, and means less difficult to the composer, but rhyme is probably the final best of them. Its exciting and hypnotic power was discovered by the Chinese, by the Persians, and Arabic poets, and doubtless independently by the late Latins in Europe. It is neither a conventional ornament, nor a mnemonic device, nor esoteric, nor ephemeral, in poetry. It is as native to a rhythm that flows high as whitecaps to the ocean.

As for the accentual rhythm, the surge of emphasis within the lines—that needs no intensification, for once it is established, it can hardly be concealed. It is established by so arranging the words that their natural accents produce it. Examine, for instance, the following sentence:

*When yóu have eáten all of yóur peánuts, yóu will nót be allówed to share míne.*

Various emphases or accented syllables are here, but no metrical rhythm. The words must be rearranged until the emphases recur at *approximately equal intervals.*

*When yóu have eáten all yóurs, my peánuts yóu cannot sháre,*

begins to suggest such an arrangement. Yet it is unsatisfactory. It sounds like the translation of a libretto. It can be improved as follows:

*"You cán't have ány of mý peanúts when yoúr peanúts are góne!"*

This possesses a rhythm so strong as to compel us to mispronounce a word without knowing that we have done so. We cannot say peá-nuts any longer, even when we try.

These three sentences will exemplify the process of producing an accentual rhythm. Each surge of this rhythm, each group of syllables containing an accent, is called a "foot." And the natural accent plays exactly the same part in the foot, that the rhyme, or the pause, or the turning back of the eyes, does in the line. It establishes and marks the crest of a rhythmic pulse. And these pulses, as well as the line pulses, might be marked off upon the page, if they were not already in danger of over-emphasis.

"Oút of the/hílls of/Háber/shám,
Dówn the/válleys of/Háll—
I húr/ry amaín/to reách/the plaín,
Rún the/rápid and/léap the/fáll——"

From this combining of the pulse of accent with the pulse of line into a single flow, there arise four

general types of rhythm. That in which the accent occurs upon the first syllable of the line, and not upon the last, we might call a downward, or falling, rhythm.

"Lázy laúghing lánguid Jénny,
Fónd of a kíss and fónd of a guínea."

That in which the accent occurs upon the first syllable, and also upon the last, would be a down-and-upward, or a falling-rising rhythm.

"Swíftly wálk o'er the wéstern wáve,
Spírit of Níght!"

That in which the accent occurs upon the second (or third) syllable, and not upon the last, would be an up-and-downward, or a rising-falling rhythm.

"Wee, sleékit, cówrin', tím'rous beástie,
O, whát a pánic's ín thy bréastie!
Thou neéd na stárt awá sae hásty,
Wi' bícк'ring bráttle!
I wád be laíth to rín an' cháse thee,
Wi' múrd'ring páttle!"

And that in which the accent occurs upon the second (or third) syllable, and also upon the last, would be a wholly upward, or rising, rhythm.

"Ye bánks and bráes o' bónny Dóon,
How cán ye blóom sae frésh and faír!
How can ye sing, ye little birds,
And I sae weary fu' o' care!

Thou'lt break my heart, thou warbling bird,
That wantons thro' the flowering thorn!
Thou minds me o' departed joys,
Departed—never to return."

These four ways of combining the line with the foot-rhythm are so different in effect that it is well either to make them alternate at regular intervals, or else to make one kind predominate enough throughout a poem to throw the mantle of its quality over the whole.

Two rhythms are so made to alternate in this supremely, and to me sadly, beautiful song of Tom Moore's.

"Come, ye disconsolate, where'er you languish,
Come, at God's altar, fervently kneel;
Here bring your wounded hearts, here tell your anguish
'Earth has no sorrow that Heaven cannot heal.'

"Joy of the desolate, Light of the straying,
Hope, when all others die, fadeless and pure,
Here speaks the Comforter, in God's name saying
'Earth has no sorrow that Heaven cannot cure.'

"Go, ask the infidel, what boon he brings us—
What charm for aching hearts he can reveal,
Sweet as that heavenly promise Hope sings us—
'Earth has no sorrow that God cannot heal.'"

In Charles Kingsley's "Song of a River," on the other hand, the spirit of a fall and rise rhythm is sustained, in spite of many variant lines, throughout.

"Clear and cool, clear and cool,
By laughing shallow and dreaming pool;
Cool and clear, cool and clear,
By shining shingle and foaming wear;
Under the crag where the ouzel sings,
And the ivied wall where the Church bell rings,
Undefiled for the undefiled;
Play by me, bathe in me, Mother and Child.

"Dank and foul, dank and foul,
By the smoky town in its murky cowl;
Foul and dank, foul and dank,
By wharf and sewer and slimy bank;
Darker and darker the further I go,
Baser and baser the richer I grow;
Who dare sport with the sin defiled?
Shrink from me, turn from me, Mother and Child.

"Strong and free, strong and free;
The flood gates are open, away to the sea.
Free and strong, free and strong,
Cleansing my streams as I hurry along
To the golden sands, and the leaping bar,
And the taintless tide that awaits me afar,
As I lose myself in the infinite main
Like a soul that has sinned and is pardoned again.
Undefiled for the undefiled;
Play by me, bathe in me, Mother and Child."

The variations possible from any of these rhythms are evidently unlimited. But a maker of poetry will usually have the swing of one or another of them definitely in his veins. And this, if he be an amateur, he can most easily acquire by

"beating the time" with a pencil, or by simply repeating a monotonous syllable in the various ways.

Tá ta, Tá ta, Tá ta
Tá ta, Tá ta, Tá

for example, and

ta Tá, ta Tá, ta Tá,
ta Tá, ta Tá, ta Tá, ta.

Two such rhythms, even in this abstract form, will have a different effect upon his spirits. And by tasting this difference he will learn more than a whole book of Greek terms could teach him.

The only other general difference between rhythms is a difference in the length of their surges. Poetry may be made, that is, with lines of greater or less length; and it may be made with feet of greater or less length. The lines will hardly exceed six (or at the most seven) feet, because if they exceed that, they cannot easily be perceived in the reading as a single thing. Within that limitation, however, the variety in length of line, or arrangements of different lengths, among which a poet may choose is determined, not by any laws of prosody, but by the laws of combination and permutation, or his own wish. Only he must remember that if he mixes lines of different length, with entire absence of regularity in the recurrence

of similar ones, he sacrifices the line almost entirely as an element of fundamental rhythm.

As for the length of foot—that, too, is determined by the poet's wish. He will find it impossible to pronounce more than three (or at the most four) syllables naturally, without placing an accent upon one of them, but within that limitation his choice is free. He may introduce whatever number of syllables between each recurrent emphasis he chooses. And he may use feet of different length in whatever succession he chooses. Only, as in the case of lines, if the length of his surge (the interval between his emphases) is not kept regular enough to maintain the general character of repeating similars in equal intervals, he will sacrifice the foot entirely as an element of fundamental rhythm.

There is little more than this to be said with truth of metrical utterance as a mode of sustaining realization. There is one thing more to be said, however, for those who wish to compose poetry. Rhythmic perception among the civilized races, and especially the musically civilized, is finer than it used to be when they shouted their poems to the accompaniment of a tom-tom. We no longer need the tom-tom's assistance in detecting a rhythm, and it only gives us a sing-song and monotonous experience, against which in itself we often react

so strongly that it fails utterly to produce a rhythmic exaltation. We simply go somewhere else. And therefore amateur poets must beware of shouting to the tom-tom. They must beware of having the actual surge of their poetry, when it is naturally read, fall in too exactly with the rhythmic pattern. For the pattern will then dominate them entirely, and their bodies will appear to be swaying and swinging and their feet drumming time to their words, and while they may themselves enter in a truly hearty and primitive fashion into this performance, it will surely appear a little ludicrous to most of their audience.

We might express it in this way, that man has grown so perspicacious, and so vain of his perspicacity in these matters, that he will not tolerate having himself played upon by a too obvious device. He will not even walk up the street with a drum, unless it conceal its monotonous function under some flippancy, skipping a beat now and then, or throwing in a little superfluous thunder. He wishes to unravel his rhythm out of something else. He wishes here, as everywhere, to find a similarity in apparent difference by at least a semiconscious act. And this little vanity of his you will have to consider, even though you may not care to cultivate the conflicts between your

pattern and your phrasal rhythm for themselves. You will have to remember continually to swing the natural utterance of your verse *out* of the channel of its rhythm, and yet swing it *in* again, and ever and ever again, so that the pulses of that rhythm, while they are not exaggerated, are yet abundantly sustained.

Remember that you are engendering and sustaining in the mind a flow of waves, and you will need no laws of prosody. Remember also that the words, and groups of words, you work with, are not common names grown old in the conveyance of a meaning; they are surprising names, new-made by you, to choose fresh qualities and details in the things you speak of, and to join them in the mind with other things they never knew before, thus sending them alive and vivid into that stream of heightened consciousness the waves induce. You will need no laws of rhetoric. You will have the knowledge of the art of writing poetry, and the surest path to its enjoyment.

## CHAPTER XV

## THE PRACTICAL VALUE OF POETRY

Every little while the members of a young men's society debate the question whether poets or statesmen have had the greatest effect upon history. They decide in favor of the poets, and then go and devote themselves to politics and practical affairs. If meanwhile a poet arises among them, he has attributed to him an unusually liquid and ineffectual character. It appears that a poet in history is divine, but a poet in the next room is a joke. Nobody demurs at our attributing power to Shakespeare, the supreme greatness of Anglo-Saxon life. Few feel that Bacon could uphold such greatness. And the farther into history we look, the more the statesmen dwindle and the poets shine. Lincoln's word of praise gives final honor to Walt Whitman, but poets are the very fame of Pericles.

This mixture of veneration with distrust toward poetry is not colloquial. It is the world's attitude. There are savages of Africa who give beads of wealth and honor to the singers that entertain them, but they bury them upside down in a hollow tree, to show that the honor is not unmixed with

contempt. I sometimes think the singers of our own day have a similarly compounded attitude toward themselves. For while they consider a life of realization so self-justifying as to warrant their renouncing for it every aspiration of an acting man, they still descend from this to complain that they are not appreciated by others, as though they had not their own reward. Even the greatest have been affected by some double current of feeling, for they have been moved to defend poetry and write apologies for her, as though she were in contempt of men, but these apologies when they were written gave her such character as would make apology an impertinence. They defended her by declaring that she is above the need or possibility of defence, she is life and mind itself.

One supreme man in literature is reputed to have renounced poetry altogether. But he did in fact only dwell with especial emphasis upon each side of this paradox. Plato is magnificent both in scorn and adoration of the poetic gift. Poets, he declares, are foolish, they are an outrage upon the moral understanding, so insidious in their arts that he is all but ready to banish the whole tribe from his ideal Republic. For what are they engaged in? They are engaged in presenting to the affections, not ideas, but mere

things, and these generally the most blood-heating kinds of things, over which they work us up into a wholly inconsequent madness. Nay, it is worse than that, for these things of theirs are not even real, they are not there at all, they are only imagined things! So why should we sacrifice our equilibrium to them? Have we not enough to exercise us in the conduct of genuine life according to intelligent principles? Such is the great question as to poetry. And I think that every poetic person who is well equipped for life, has in him this platonic and vulgar contempt of conscious realization, and can taste the anathema in the term poet. "He who cannot rise above his writings that he has been long patching and piecing together, adding some and taking away some, may be justly called Poet!" says Plato, in high scorn of his own pursuits.

It seems as though a man ought to have something to do. Sitting in a hammock with a book of rhyme, realizing the intrinsic being of something, perhaps the west wind, when he ought to trim a windmill, and be starting up the pump—this is a poor picture of a hero. So poor is it, that it will probably bring those who adore poetry, if they have not been brought already, into open conflict with our opinion that it is essentially a realization. They will declare that poetry does

promote achievement, does concern itself with practical truth and meaning. A man unacquainted with the "Book of Poems," according to Confucius, is not only unable to see, but also unable to advance—he is face to face with a stone wall. According to Philip Sidney, effective instruction is almost the definitive function of poetry. For Shelley all life's idealism, all progress of the spirit, all hope of high action, is contained in the word. And no one of these enthusiasts exceeds Plato himself, who declares, with royal inconsistency, that the character of a people depends so much more upon their songs than upon anything else, that we ought to make these the chief forces in education. Give them great poetry and the state will flourish. Did he say that poetry is madness? Yes—but the madness of poets is the most efficacious state of being that this world offers. Madmen are strong. They mould history and the earth. Is it not a kind of madness that the world exists at all, a kind of infatuation with the idea of being? And is not the madness of Homer more akin to divinity than the sanity of all your politicians? Would you not even rather join yourself with Homer, who so loved reality, and begot with her such children as the Iliad and the Odyssey, than be a husband and the father in respectability of a whole family of industrious citizens?

Such is the other judgment of Plato, and his enthusiasm when he speaks upon the brighter side of this universal paradox.

We cannot but conclude that poetry is of high practical value; it is of value to purposive conduct and adjustment for the future. And yet we know that in some way it is also not practical, and of no value beyond itself. I think there would be no inconsistency here, if we were not too eager to generalize—if we were content to say that some poetry is of high practical value, and that other poetry is of no such value at all. Then we should be separating the general definition of poetry from the estimation of particular poems, as heretofore none of its lovers have been willing to do, and we could resolve that ancient paradox and subject it to the demands of rationality.

The poetic as such is not concerned with conduct or the conveyance of meaning. But when one who is concerned with conduct and desires to convey a meaning, conveys it poetically, he adds to his speech a great and separate power. He not only gives to our mind the indication, or the general information that he wishes, but he gives to our bodies an acute impression less easy to forget. To read in practical language is to be told, but to read in poetry is to learn by experience. And it is because of this, because imaginative realiza-

tion can enhance the statement of a meaning and augment its practical effect, that poetry has become identified with meaning, and with truth, and wisdom, and morality, and all those things that look greatly into the future. Poetry but lends itself to them. It is of its own nature foreign to them all.

Suppose we say that life and danger and death are a great adventure, and it is best to know them and enter into them heartily—we should put into that statement almost all the meaning of this poem, but we should leave out the living realization of its meaning:

> "Give me a spirit that on life's rough sea
> Loves to have his sails fill'd with a lusty wind
> Even till his sail-yards tremble, his masts crack,
> And his rapt ship run on her side so low
> That she drinks water and her keel ploughs air;
> There is no danger to a man that knows
> What life and death is—there's not any law
> Exceeds his knowledge."

Does not such poetry add itself and its own efficacy, entirely new, to the meaning which we had expressed? And furthermore, if poetry can add efficacy to such a meaning, will it not also add efficacy to false or impractical meanings? I think that we should as rigorously condemn a poet for touching the torch of realization to an unheroic idea, such as this,

" 'T is not what man Does which exalts him, but what man Would do!"

as we should extol him for giving illumination to a great concept. But in either case the illumination is not the concept, and if opinions are ever to be consistent upon this subject, it must be distinguished from it by the understanding. No meaning properly so called has ever been expressed with poetry, which could not conceivably be severed from its poetry and set forth in practical language.

Perhaps this judgment does not give to poetry as such the most commanding place in men's esteem. For while they all respect the expression of a meaning destitute of poetry, calling this a culmination of their scientific spirit, but few give honor to any poetry that is unrelated to a meaning. Reading pure poetry is like gazing on the moonlight long. We wish we could receive it, but we cannot—a final proof that we are sadly practical at heart. We are but driven pilgrims through the world, the children of its evolution, and we must be going on. Pure being is too much for us. The best that we can ask of moonlight is that it shall shine upon our occupation. Perhaps the best that we can ask of poetry is that it shall attend the statement of a truth with glory. And yet there are great poems, poems universally

called great, which are pure realizations. There is Keats's "Ode to Autumn." Let it be held a supreme achievement of his genius. For with all the world intent upon a future, eager for the word that indicates, it is not easy to withhold it and be noble. It is not possible for those mere lovers of their moods who oftenest elect to try it. But for those whose character and thought are deep, determined onward with the world, and who arrest us as the world itself sometimes arrests us for a moment only with the wonder of its being, it is possible. Pure poetry upon their lips seems even more divine than truth, more ultimate, more universal.

There is indeed, for those who recognize its aim, a value in such poetry that goes beyond the present. There is a value toward a goal not yet attained. Even the mere realization of autumn in its absence—unattended though it be by any moral or true meaning—looks somewhat to a future end. It looks to autumn. It is not only an imagination, but a preperception, and its value culminates in the more full experience of the very hours it dreamed of. Thus the poetry of words may be regarded as a means toward the poetry of life. It is to that end practical. It nourishes the waking spirit, nourishes the gift of vision, and the tendency to issue from the bondages of habit

and receive the world. We recognize this value in our kindergartens, where we seek to train the mind in childhood for keeping awake during a lifetime. But poetry continues and renews this training always. We do not read Shelley and then return to the world, but we see the world through Shelley's eyes. Creative vision of the specific actual throughout all time—creative vision kindled by that flaming language, is an onward and immortal value of his songs.

The poetry of books prepares, and also it restores. To us the world grows stale, because in proportion as we become accustomed to a thing we are estranged from it. In proportion as we win the daily presence of our friends, we lose them. We come to regard life as a dry package of facts. We want the spirituous refreshment of another's vision. We want to have our eyes reopened, and our souls made naked to the touch of being.

This is the priesthood of art—not to bestow upon the universe a new aspect, but upon the beholder a new enthusiasm. At our doors every morning the creation is sung. The day is a drama, the night is an unfolding mystery, within whose shadowy arena impetuous life shall still contend with death. A world laughs and bleeds for us all the time, but our response in this

meteoric theatre we suffer to be drugged with business and decorum. We are born sleeping, and few of us ever awake, unless it be upon some hideous midnight when death startles us, and we learn in grief alone what bit of Olympian fire our humid forms enwrapped. But we could open our eyes to joy also. The poet cries "Awake!" and sings the song of the morning. He that hath eyes let him see! Even now all around us the trees have arisen, and their leaves are tongues of the air in song—the earth swings on in drastic revolution—and we laugh and love perpetually—and the winds enlarge our goings and our comings with a tune.

The poet, the restorer, is the prophet of a greater thing than faith. All creeds and theories serve him, for he goes behind them all, and imparts by a straighter line from his mind to yours the spirit of bounteous living. His wisdom is above knowledge. He cries to our sleeping selves to come aloft, and when we are come he answers with a gesture only. In him we find no principle; we find ourselves re-born alive into the world.

So far from being past, or on the wane, this wisdom of the soul of poetry looks for the first time joyfully into the future. Man is now returning to his rights as an animal. He has now learned that morals is not meant for a scourge and a dry

medicine, and that joy is its own reason. Existence was not perpetrated in malice or benevolence, but simply is, and the end of our thinking is that here we are, and what can we make of it. We have a planet to act upon, a sense of the drama. We will not squat and argue, nor balk, and try to justify God, but we will make with high hearts of abandon our entrance and our exit before the congregation of the stars.

# IDEALS OF POETRY

# IDEALS OF POETRY

Poetry that has life for its subject, and democratic reality, is rather expected to manifest that irregular flow and exuberance of material over structure with which Walt Whitman challenged the world. In America at least the freedom and poignant candor of strong art is associated with the tradition that he founded, and little is granted to that other tradition which finds its original in Edgar Allan Poe. There existed in Europe, however, a succession of poets whose eyes turned back in admiration to Poe, and they were poets of reality, and those who touched the mood of social revolt. And for my part I think there is a modern validity in the attitudes of both these poets, a certain adjudication between them which a perfectly impersonal science might propose; and that is what I should like to discuss with those who may enter sympathetically into these pages.

They will all be familiar, I suppose, with Walt Whitman's ideal of an American poetry so free and strong and untrammelled of ornamentation, that it

should go out of the books it was published in, and stand up with the hills and forests on the earth.

"The poetry of the future," he said, "aims at the free expression of emotion, (which means far, far more than appears at first,) and to arouse and initiate, more than to define or finish. . . .

"In my opinion the time has arrived to essentially break down the barriers of form between prose and poetry. I say the latter is henceforth to win and maintain its character regardless of rhyme, and the measurement-rules of iambic, spondee, dactyl, &c., and that even if rhyme and those measurements continue to furnish the medium for inferior writers and themes, (especially for persiflage and the comic, as there seems henceforward, to the perfect taste, something inevitably comic in rhyme, merely in itself, and anyhow,) the truest and greatest *Poetry*, (while subtly and necessarily always rhythmic, and distinguishable easily enough,) can never again, in the English language, be express'd in arbitrary and rhyming metre, any more than the greatest eloquence, or the truest power and passion. While admitting that the venerable and heavenly forms of chiming versification have in their time play'd great and fitting parts—that the pensive complaint, the ballads, wars, amours, legends of Europe, &c.,

have, many of them, been inimitably render'd in rhyming verse—that there have been very illustrious poets whose shapes the mantle of such verse has beautifully and appropriately envelopt —and though the mantle has fallen, with perhaps added beauty, on some of our own age—it is, notwithstanding, certain to me, that the day of such conventional rhyme is ended. In America, at any rate, and as a medium of highest æsthetic practical or spiritual expression, present or future, it palpably fails, and must fail, to serve. The Muse of the Prairies, of California, Canada, Texas, and of the peaks of Colorado, dismissing the literary, as well as social etiquette of over-sea feudalism and caste, joyfully enlarging, adapting itself to comprehend the size of the whole people, with the free play, emotions, pride, passions, experiences, that belong to them, body and soul—to the general globe, and all its relations in astronomy, as the savants portray them to us—to the modern, the busy Nineteenth century, (as grandly poetic as any, only different,) with steamships, railroads, factories, electric telegraphs, cylinder presses—to the thought of the solidarity of nations, the brotherhood and sisterhood of the entire earth—to the dignity and heroism of the practical labor of farms, factories, foundries, workshops, mines, or on shipboard, or on lakes

and rivers—resumes that other medium of expression, more flexible, more eligible—soars to the freer, vast, diviner heaven of prose."

It may surprise some people to see this monumental challenge to the poets of the future confronted with the pathetic memory of Edgar Allan Poe. And yet it is natural to place these two poets in contrast, and the weight neither of genius nor of influence is altogether upon one side. They are the two American poets of unique distinction, and they are the fountains of the two strongest influences in all modern poetry of the occident. And it is worth observing that if Walt Whitman had written as few pages of poetry as Poe did, his name would hardly be remembered, whereas Poe would have established a literary tradition if he had written but five sorrowful lyrics. His individuality was so poignant. His art was so exquisite. And not only was his art exquisite, but his philosophy of his art was as unique, assertive, and prodigious in contempt for his predecessors, as that of Walt Whitman. I have never read anything about any art more sheer and startling in its kind than Poe's essay on "The Philosophy of Composition"; and nothing more energetically opposite to Walt Whitman could possibly be devised. To convey the flavor of the contrast, I

quote these sentences—inadequate for any other purpose—from Poe's essay:

"Most writers—poets in especial—prefer having it understood that they compose by a species of fine frenzy—an ecstatic intuition; and would positively shudder at letting the public take a peep behind the scenes at the elaborate and vacillating crudities of thought, at the true purposes seized only at the last moment, at the innumerable glimpses of idea that arrived not at the maturity of full view, at the fully matured fancies discarded in despair as unmanageable, at the cautious selections and rejections, at the painful erasures and interpolations—in a word, at the wheels and pinions, the tackle for scene-shifting, the step-ladders and demon-traps, the cock's feathers, the red paint and the black patches. . . .

"For my own part, I have neither sympathy with the repugnance alluded to, nor at any time the least difficulty in recalling to mind the progressive steps of any of my compositions; and, since the interest of an analysis, or reconstruction, such as I have considered a *desideratum*, is quite independent of any real or fancied interest in the thing analyzed, it will not be regarded as a breach of decorum on my part to show the *modus operandi* by which some one of my own works

was put together. I select 'The Raven' as most generally known.

"Let us dismiss, as irrelevant to the poem *per se*, the circumstance—or say the necessity—which in the first place gave rise to the intention of composing *a* poem that should suit at once the popular and critical taste.

"We commence, then, with this intention.

"The initial consideration was that of extent. If any literary work is too long to be read at one sitting, we must be content to dispense with the immensely important effect derivable from unity of impression; for, if two sittings be required, the affairs of the world interfere, and everything like totality is at once destroyed. . . .

"My next thought concerned the choice of an impression, or effect, to be conveyed: and here I may as well observe that, throughout the construction, I kept steadily in view the design of rendering the work *universally* appreciable. I should be carried too far out of my immediate topic were I to demonstrate a point upon which I have repeatedly insisted, and which with the poetical stands not in the slightest need of demonstration—the point, I mean, that Beauty is the sole legitimate province of the poem. . . .

"But in subjects so handled, however skilfully, or with however vivid an array of incident, there

is always a certain hardness or nakedness, which repels the artistical eye. Two things are invariably required: first, some amount of complexity, or more properly, adaptation; and, second, some amount of suggestiveness, some under-current, however indefinite, of meaning. It is this latter, in especial, which imparts to a work of art so much of that *richness* (to borrow from colloquy a forcible term) which we are too fond of confounding with *the ideal.*"

The opposition of these two characters and attitudes is complete. Upon the one side a vast preoccupation with human meaning and morals, with health and the common reality and love and democracy, a grand contempt for beauty, and for the effort to attract or gratify a reader with "verbal melody," a contempt for everything that savors of deliberate technique in art. Upon the other side also contempt—contempt like a piece of cold analytical steel for every pretense that the technique of art is not deliberate, that poets are not seeking to attract and gratify, that truth or moral or meaning instead of beauty is the portent of a poem—a disposition to seek beauty in unique and even unhealthy places, a lonely aristocratic heart of pain, and a preoccupation with "verbal melody" never before or since equalled

in poetry. The details of this difference are fascinating, but the generalization of it is what will illumine the modern problems about poetry. To Edgar Allan Poe a poem was an objective thing, to Walt Whitman poetry was an act of subjective expression. Poe would take sounds and melodies of words almost actually into his hands, and carve and model them until he had formed a beautiful vessel, and he would take emotions and imaginations out of his heart and weave and inlay them in that vessel, and even the crimson out of his blood, and finally for "enrichment" he would seek out in his mind the hue of some meaning or moral to pour over it until it was perfect. And these beautiful vessels he would set forth for view and purchase, standing aside from them like a creative trader, proud, but no more identified with them than as though he had made them out of the colors of shells. To Walt Whitman a poem was not a thing. His poetry was himself. His meanings, emotions, experiences, love and wonder of life, filled him and he overflowed in language—without "art," without purpose but to communicate his being. So he maintained. His poem was never an object to him, even after it had flowed full and he sought to perfect its contours. His emendations were not often objective improvements; they were private remodellings to

make the language a more direct and fluent identity with what he considered himself. This was the task upon which he labored as the poet of democracy and social love.

Now, it is not merely an accident, or a reflection upon America or upon human nature, that Walt Whitman, with all his yearnings over the average American and his offering of priesthood and poetry to the people, should remain the poet of a rather esoteric few, whereas Poe—even with the handful of poems he wrote—may be said to be acceptable to the generality of men. "The Raven," or "Helen," or "Annabelle Lee," or some sad musical echo of the death of beauty, might be found in illuminated covers on the most "average" of American parlor tables, but never anything there of Walt Whitman—unless it be "Captain, My Captain!" the one rather weak metrical poem he deigned to write. And there is something deeply and really pathetic in this fact, and something which only an adequate science of verse can explain. For the emotions and the meanings of Walt Whitman's poetry are actually the ones that interest simple and thoughtful people who have leisure to feel. His realizations of life would be acceptable and be honored, as much at least as great art is ever honored, by the "divine average," if they had been conveyed, as Poe's were,

in vessels of light, which would make them objective, and from which they might brim over with excess of subjective meaning and emotion.

I do not mean to express a wish that Walt Whitman had conveyed them so, or the opinion that he could have been a more stupendous poetic and moral hero of nature by writing otherwise than he did. His propulsive determination to put forth in this facile nineteenth-century culture, sweet with the decay and light with the remnant fineries of feudal grandeur, the original, vast, unfinished substance of man, was a phenomenon like the rising of a volcanic continent amid ships on the sea. No word but the words in his book can portray the magnitude of his achievement; no critic but Envy could judge it except as itself and by its own standard. But as a prophetic example of the poems of the future, and especially the poems of democracy and social love, it suffers a weakness—the weakness that Walt Whitman's character suffered. It is egocentric and a little inconsiderate of the importance of other people. Walt Whitman composed wonderful passages about universal social love, but he could not be the universal poet exactly because he was not social enough. He was not humble enough to be social. The rebel egoism of democracy was in him the lordly and compelling thing, and though

his love for the world was prodigious, it was not the kind of love that gives attention instinctively to the egoism of others.

There may be no grand passion for the idea, but there is a natural companionship with the fact of "democracy," in Poe's statement that he "kept steadily in view the design of rendering the work universally appreciable," and that statement more characteristically distinguishes his attitude from Walt Whitman's than the different ways they had of talking about beauty. All poets who mould their poems objectively, even though they may conceive themselves to be utterly alone with beauty, are really in social communion with humanity. For that is what the word *objective* means. An object, or as we say, a "thing," differs from other elements of our experience only in that it can be experienced in the same form at different times and by different persons. And for an object to be beautiful is for it to hold value in itself, so that various perceivers may come from all sides and find it there. Therefore one who moulds an object toward external perfection, however sad his solitude, enters directly into the "universal friendship" toward which Walt Whitman directed so much of the longing of his words. One who pours out phrases direct from his emotion may experience a relief and glory that im-

plies listeners, and he may win listeners, but they will each rebuild out of his phrases their own different poem, and they will comprise in their number only those endowed with the special power to build poems out of phrases poured out. And whatever we may wish were true of the world, it is not true that the majority are so endowed. Therefore the poetry that is highly subjective is almost inevitably the poetry of a few; and the "direct expression of emotion" achieves a less clear and general social communion than the embodiment of emotion in an object of art.

It could be established, I believe, with mechanical precision, that the rhythmic values most cherished by the social rebels who now write so much "free verse," are values practically incommunicable to others, and absolutely incommunicable by the method usually adopted, that of printing words on a page. A little of that icy matter-of-fact realism with which Poe used to scatter the sweet foggy thoughts of the literarious, while it might not affect the art of these poets, would surely reduce the volume of what they have to say about it. For instance, here is the answer of one of them to an assertion that the line division in free verse is "arbitrary," and that if we copied one of these long poems in solid prose, the poet himself could hardly ever divide it again as it was:

"Free verse that is free verse is *not* arbitrary. Much of it is, of course—so are many canvases mere splashy imitations of Matisse. But there is free verse that resolves itself into just those lines —a little more subtly than sonnets or triolets—by virtue of pauses, of heart-beats, of the quickness or slowness of your breath, and maybe of your pulse itself. . . . It tries to give the rhythm value of those hesitations, those quickenings and slowings of the flow of ideas, the flutterings—it is *closer to the breath*, as modern music and modern dance are, or as primitive music and primitive dance were."

It is impossible not to respond to such assertions, for we know in ourselves what these exquisite differential experiences are. Any one who has ever written love-letters—which are a kind of aboriginal free verse—knows what they are. And yet I believe it is obvious, if not demonstrable, that most of them are too individual to be communicated even to a lover. Human nature is too various for it to be true that the same hesitations, the same quickenings and slowings of the flow of ideas, flutterings of the breath or pulse, will reproduce themselves in another upon the perception of the same visible symbols. And while this fact may make the art of composition seem a little monotonous, it is better that

art should be monotonous than that the world should. And it would be a monotonous world in which different people were so much alike, or we ourselves so much alike at different moments, that these minute filigrees of feeling should be altogether durable and capable of being served round in paper and ink.

There are values of verbal rhythm in a flow of thought and feeling which exist for one individual alone, and for him once only. There are other values less delicate which he can reproduce in himself at will, but cannot altogether communicate to other minds whose thoughts and feelings are too much their own. There are other values, still less delicate, which he might communicate by vocal utterance and rhythmic gesture, taking possession as it were of the very pulse and respiration of others. But poetry which is composed for publication ought to occupy itself with those rhythmic values which may be communicated to other rhythmic minds through the printing of words on a page. It ought to do this, at least, if it pretends to an attitude that is even in the most minute degree social.

A mature science of rhythm might be imagined to stride into the room where these poets are discussing the musical values of their verse, seize two or three of the most "free" and subtle among

them, lock them into separate sound-proof chambers, and allow them to read one of their favorite passages into the ear of an instrument designed to record in spatial outline the pulsations of vocal accent. It is safe to assert that there would be less identity in the actual pulsations recorded than if the same two were reading a passage of highly wrought English prose.[1] And the reason for this is that free verse imports into English prose a form of punctuation that is exceedingly gross and yet absolutely inconsequential. Its line division has neither a metrical nor a logical significance that exists objectively. It can mean at any time anything that is desirable to the whims, or needful to the difficulties, of the reader or the writer. It is a very sign and instrument of subjectivity. To incorporate in a passage of printed symbols an indeterminate element so marked and so frequent as that, is to say to the reader—"Take the passage and organize it

[1] This statement is borne out by Mr. William Morrison Patterson's account of the records of Amy Lowell's reading of her poems in his laboratory. It constitutes the preface of the second edition of his book, "The Rhythm of Prose" —a book which, upon the true basis of experimentation, analyzes and defines convincingly for the first time the nature of rhythmical experience, and the manner in which it is derived by the reader both from prose and metrical poetry. Until it is amplified or improved by further investigation, this book will surely be the basis of every scientific discussion of the questions involved here.

into whatever rhythmical pattern may please yourself." And that is what the reader of free verse usually does, knowing that if he comes into any great difficulty, he can make a full stop at the end of some line, and shift the gears of his rhythm altogether. And since it is possible for one who is rhythmically gifted to organize *any indeterminate series of impressions whatever* into an acceptable rhythm, he frequently produces a very enjoyable piece of music, which he attributes to the author and, having made it himself, is not unable to admire. Thus a good many poets who could hardly beat a going march on a base drum, are enabled by the gullibility and talent of their readers to come forward in this kind of writing as musicians of special and elaborate skill. The "freedom" that it gives them is not a freedom to build rhythms that are impossible in prose, but a freedom from the necessity to build actual and continuous rhythms. Free verse avails itself of the rhythmic appearance of poetry, and it avoids the extreme rhythmic difficulties of prose, and so it will certainly live as a supremely convenient way to write, among those not too strongly appealed to by the greater convenience of not writing. But as an object of the effort of ambitious artists I cannot believe it will widely survive the

knowledge that it is merely a convenience, a form of mumble and indetermination in their art.

Walt Whitman, however he may have been deceived about the social and democratic character of his form, was not deceived, as the modern eulogists of free verse are, about its subtlety. He thought that he had gained in volume and directness of communion, but he knew that he was discarding subtlety, discarding in advance all those beautiful and decadent wonders of microscopic and morbid audacity that developed in France among the admirers of Poe. The modern disciples of his form, however, are materially of Poe's persuasion, and like to believe that they have in free verse an instrument expressly fitted for the communication of those wonders, and of the most delicate modulations of that "verbal melody" that Whitman scorned. In this, from the true standpoint of criticism, Whitman has a commanding advantage over them, and what can be said of free verse in general cannot be said of his poems. He did achieve the predominant thing that he aimed to achieve—he made his poetry rough and artless in spite of his fineness and art. He made it like the universe and like the presence of a man. In that triumph it will stand. In that

character it will mould and influence the literature of democracy, because it will mould and influence all literature in all lands.

"Who touches this book touches a man."

There is, however, another ideal of poetry that Walt Whitman confused with this one, and that he no more exemplified in his form than he exemplified democratic and social communion. And this ideal is predominant too in the minds of his modern followers. It is the ideal of being natural, of being primitive, dismissing "refinements" and the tricks of literary sophistication. He wanted his poetry to sound with nature and the untutored heart of humanity. It was in the radiance of this desire that he spoke of rhythmical prose as a "vast diviner heaven," toward which poetry would move in its future development in America. Prose seemed diviner to him because it seemed more simple, more large with candor and directness. But here again a cool and clear science will show that his nature led him in a contrary direction from its ideal. The music of prose is only dissimilar to that of poetry in its complexity, its subtle and refined *dissimulation* of the fundamental monotonous metre that exists, either expressed or implied, in the heart of all rhythmical experience. Persons who can read the rhythm of

prose can do so because they have in their own breast, or intellect, a subdued or tacit perpetual standard pulse-beat, around which by various instinctive mathematical tricks of substitution and syncopation they so arrange the accents of the uttered syllables that they fall in with its measure, and become one with it, increasing its momentum and its effect of entrancement upon the nerves and body. There is no rhythm without this metrical basis, no value in rhythm comparable to the trance that its thrilling monotony engenders. Its undulations are akin to the intrinsic character of neural motion, and that is why, almost as though it were a chemical thing—a stimulant and narcotic—it takes possession of our state of being and controls it.

Poetry only naïvely acknowledges this ecstatic monotony that lives in the heart of all rhythm, brings it out into the light, and there openly weaves upon it the patterns of melodic sound. Poetry is thus the more natural, and both historically and psychologically, the more primitive of the two arts. It is the more simple. Metre, and even rhyme—which is but a colored, light drum-beat, accentuating the metre—are not "ornaments" or "refinements" of something else which may be called "rhythmical speech." They are the heart of rhythmical speech expressed and ex-

posed with a perfectly childlike and candid grandeur. Prose is the refinement. Prose is the sophisticated and studio accomplishment—a thing that vast numbers of people have not the fineness of endowment or cultivation either to write or read. Prose is a civilized sublimation of poetry, in which the original healthy intoxicant note of the tom-tom is so laid over with fine traceries of related sound, that it can no longer be identified at all except by the analytical eye of science.

Walt Whitman was not really playful and childlike enough to go back to nature. His poetry was less primitive and savage than it was superhuman and sublime. His emotions were as though they came to him through a celestial telescope. There is something more properly savage—something at least truly barbarous—in a poem like Poe's "Bells." And in Poe's insistence upon "beauty" as the sole legitimate province of the poem—beauty, which he defines as a special and dispassionate "excitement of the soul"—he is nearer to the mood of the snake dance. Poetry was to him a deliberate perpetration of ecstasy. And one can see in reading his verses how he was attuned to sway and quiver to the mere syllabic singing of a kettledrum, until his naked visions grew more intense and lovely than the passions and real meanings of his life. It is actually primi-

tive, as well as childlike, to play with poetry in this intense and yet unsanctimonious way that Poe did, and Baudelaire too, and Swinburne. Play is nearer to the heart of nature than aspiration. It is healthier perhaps too, and more to the taste of the future, than priesthood. I think the essence of what we call classical in an artist's attitude is his quite frank acknowledgment that—whatever great things may come of it—he is at play. The art of the Athenians was objective and overt about being what it is, because the Athenians were educated, as all free men should be, for play. They were making things; and the eagerness of their hearts flowed freely out like a child's through their eyes upon the things that they made. That pearl of adult degeneration, the self, was very little cultivated in Athens; the "artistic temperament" was unborn; and sin, and the perpetual yearning beyond of Christians, had not been thought of. A little group of isolated and exclusive miracles had not reduced all the true and current glories of life to a status of ignobility, so that every great thing must contain in itself intimations of otherness. The Athenians were radiantly willing, without any cosmical preparation or blare of moral resolve, to let the constellations stay where they are. It was their custom to "loaf and invite their souls," to be "satisfied—

see, dance, laugh, sing." They were so maturely naïve that they would hardly understand what Walt Whitman, with his declarations of animal independence, was trying to recover from. And so it is by way of their happy and sun-loved city that we can most surely go back to nature.

And when we have arrived at a mood that is really and childly natural—a mood that will play, even with aspiration, and will spontaneously make out of interesting materials "things" to play with, and when in that mood we give our interest to the materials of reality in our own time, then perhaps we shall find that we have arrived also at a poetry that belongs to the people. For people are, in the depths of them and on the average, as they are born, still natural, still savage. And there is no doubt that nature never fashioned them to work harder, or be more serious, or filled with self-conscious purports, than was necessary. She meant them to live and flow out upon the world with the bright colors of their interest. And it will seem rather a fever in the light of universal history, this hot subjective meaningfulness of everything we modern occidentals value. The poets and the poet-painters of ancient China knew that all life and nature is so sacred with the miracle of being that only the lucid line and color is needed to command an immortal rever-

ence. They loved perfection devoutly, as it will rarely be loved, but they too, with their gift of delicate freedom in kinship with nature, were at play. And in Japan even to-day—surviving from that time—there is a form of poetry that is objective and childlike, a making of toys, or of exquisite metrical gems of imaginative realization, and this is the only poetry in the world that is truly popular, and is loved and cultivated by a whole nation.

If with this pagan and oriental love for the created thing—the same love that kept a light in Poe's sombre heart—we enter somewhat irreverently into Walt Whitman's volume, seeking our own treasure and not hesitating to remove it from its bed of immortal slag, we do find poems in new forms of exquisite and wonderful definition. Sometimes for the length of one or two or three lines, and occasionally for a stanza, and once for the whole poem—"When I heard at the close of the day"—Walt Whitman seems to love and achieve the carved concentration of image and emotion, the definite and thrilling chime of syllables along a chain that begins and ends and has a native way of uttering itself to all minds that are in tune. He seems, without losing that large grace of freedom from the pose and elegance of words in a book, which was his most original gift

to the world, to possess himself of the mood that is truly primitive, and social, and intelligible to the hearts of simple people—the mood that loves with a curious wonder the poised and perfect existence of a thing.

### HUSH'D BE THE CAMPS

Hush'd be the camps today;
And, soldiers, let us drape our war-worn weapons;
And each with musing soul retire, to celebrate,
Our dear commander's death.

No more for him life's stormy conflicts;
Nor victory, nor defeat—no more time's dark events,
Charging like ceaseless clouds across the sky.

### RECONCILIATION

Word over all, beautiful as the sky!
Beautiful that war, and all its deeds of carnage, must in time be utterly lost;
That the hands of the sisters Death and Night, incessantly softly wash again, and ever again, this soil'd world. . . .

These sculptural sentences, with their rhythmic and still clarity of form, if they had been the end and essence of his art, and not only a by-accident of inevitable genius, might have led the way, not perhaps to a great national poetry for America, but beyond that into something international and

belonging to the universe of man. The step forward from them would not have been toward a greater sprawling and subjectifying of rhythmic and poetic character, but toward an increasing objective perfection which should still cling to the new and breathless thing, the presence of one who lives and speaks his heart naturally. I chose them, not only because they are among the most musical and imaginative lines that Walt Whitman wrote, but also because in bringing a mood that is calm and a lulling of wind in the world's agonies of hate, they show themselves to be deep. And so it will not be thought that when I say the poet of democracy will be a child who is at play with the making of things, I desire to narrow the range and poignancy of the things he will make. He will be free, and he will move with a knowing and profound mind among all the experiences and the dreams of men. But to whatever heights of rhapsody, or moral aspiration, or now unimaginable truth, he may come, he will come as a child, whose clear eyes and deliberate creative purposes are always appropriate and never to be apologized for, because they are the purposes of nature.

# NOTES

# NOTES

## Page 6

In an essay called "The Will to Live," and published in the *Journal of Philosophy, Psychology and Scientific Methods* (Vol. XIV, No. 4), I discussed the scientific basis and implication of the statement that there is in all animal life such an impulse, or "general innate tendency," as I have here described. I wish that people who feel sceptical of my psychology at this point would read that essay.

## Page 11

The quotation is from Robert Browning's "Saul."

## Page 12

Irving King in "The Psychology of Child Development," p. 147, records an instance similar to the one I describe. He also, on p. 174, shows very conclusively that what we call in children "the instinct of imitation" is not that, in any intelligible sense, but a desire to enlarge, and intensify (or as he says, because he writes from a purely practical view-point, define) their own experience. To put it in their own words, they are always wanting to "see what it feels like." And this is not merely the instinct of curiosity either, for after they *know* what it feels like, they still want to feel it again. Indeed, the instinct of curiosity itself may, like other feelings, become the object of this desire. "The child is curious," says M. Claparède in his "Psychologie de l'Enfant," "for the pleasure of being curious; the scholar is curious in order to know." But any work upon the psychology of children will more or less unconsciously bear out the statement that children are more interested in experience for its own sake than adults.

## Page 13

The quotation is from Keats's "Ode to Melancholy."

## Page 15

The quotation is from Wordsworth's sonnet, "The World Is Too Much With Us."

Page 19

The quotation is from Walt Whitman's "Crossing Brooklyn Ferry."

Page 23

I have mentioned the three classic theories of the origin of speech. That they should have appeared as opposing theories, and begot volumes, is an example of that puerility of the academic intellect, and the foolishness which infects both science and conversation, of supposing that a single generalization is always possible and is the form of truth. Probably the majority of words never originated in any of these pretty ways. Otto Jespersen in his "Progress in Language" (chap. IX) has pointed out that simultaneous occurrence, however accidental, is enough to establish a connection between syllables and experiences. Granted, therefore, a savage with excess energy to exhaust in vocal exercises as he goes along, and you have adequate conditions for the birth either of practical or poetic names.

Suppose that he happens to be singing ta-ra-ra-ra boom-de-aye when he is splitting the kindlings this morning; it may well happen that he sings the same syllables at the same time to-morrow morning, and so on, until ta-ra-ra comes to "mean" split-the-kindlings.

Page 24

In English a struggle for survival has long raged, and is raging, among these verb-forms. And of late years the battle is not to the strong, but to the handy—the loss of those old forms being one of the poetic sorrows of our tongue, though it would be expeditious and an act of practical good sense, I suppose, to wipe out the whole tribe.

We might examine the character of those strong forms which survived, against those which perished, and see if it were not special poetic strength which determined the

issue in many cases, and thus perhaps we could oppose the tendency of scholars nowadays to impute everything that has happened in language to a desire to make it practical.

As examples of that tendency I select these quotations:

"To no other law than that of economy of utterance have any of the phenomena of phonetic change been found traceable (though it is also to be noted that some phenomena have not hitherto been successfully brought under it, and that the way of effecting this is still unclear)." —WILLIAM DWIGHT WHITNEY (Article on "Philology" in the "Encyclopædia Britannica").

The only test of the merits of languages that is of any value is "the practical interests of the speaking (or talking) community." — OTTO JESPERSEN ("Progress in Language").

Page 25

The word rakehell is a poetic "corruption" of the adjective *rakel*, meaning rash. "Train oil," a degeneration from *Thräne* or "tear-like" oil, may serve as an example of a practical corruption.

Corruption in language is often almost as valuable as creation. Out in Colorado there is a winding river which some starving first-settler, a Frenchman, called the *Purgatoire*. But that name has no appropriateness for the prosperous citizens who now dwell along its coils; for them it is the *Picketwire*. The name is still poetic.

Skeat says of *ghastly*, "the *h* has been inserted for no very good reason." But to those who taste the flavors of words it has been inserted, as also in ghost, for the best of all reasons, namely, that it makes the word suggest its object. It is a kind of strange, breathless letter there—essentially unpronounced, unmuscularized, supernatural.

Our ancestors are being scolded by the simplified spelling board for such liberties as this. They took an *h* out of *gossip* and inserted one into ghost! This is highly "irregular," "impractical," and "unscientific," but it shows that they knew in their immediate experience the essential difference between a gossip and a ghost, and they could convey this in the most delicate poetry, and they cared to. Is the lack in them, or in the simplified spelling board?

Page 26

*Bluff, crib, grad, flank,* are slang words of purely practical value.

*Swelled head, brass, face, paint the town red, have a bee in your bonnet, down and out, a mossback, a jonah,* are poetic, with the usual tincture of humor. *To have a bee in your bonnet* is a metaphor which occurs, if I remember rightly, as the basis of a stanza of one of Burns's poems.

Page 50

The quotations are from Keats's early poem, "I Stood Tip-toe Upon a Little Hill," except "The Grey Fly," which is from Milton's "Lycidas," and "Million-footed Manhattan," which is from Walt Whitman.

Page 53

It has been customary to divide comparison, or the association of ideas as it is called, into two kinds—association by resemblance and association by contiguity. That this is not a fundamental difference, but that both kinds of association are instances of the redintegration of a past experience in memory according to the laws of habit, is one of the opinions of Aristotle, rediscovered by modern psychology. In a contribution to the *Journal of Philosophy, Psychology and Scientific Methods,* vol. VII, no. 6, entitled "To Reconsider the Association of Ideas," I

tried to show that this doctrine even as it now stands is not satisfactory and that its terminology needs revising. I do not believe that I reached the bottom of the question in that article, but if any one cares to read it, he will find there some indication of how I came to treat comparison as essentially an interruption, and explain its value to realization in the way I have.

Page 54

In this section I may appear to give more standing to the purely practical theory of the origin of consciousness, than I wish to. I believe, as I stated in chapter I and at the beginning of chapter II, that the impulse toward consciousness for its own sake, is fundamental. And I may reconcile what I said then with what I say here, by calling attention to the fact that even though I describe our life in general as blindly practical, I point out that the poets are there, seeking to arouse us. They too must have their explanation. The poetic in each of us must have its explanation. And I believe the only explanation it can have is the placing of it equal with the onward impulse, as an original and arbitrary quality of life.

Page 56

If "similarity" were the object of attraction in a poetic comparison, we should find pleasure in those pedantic similes in which various points of resemblance are brought forward, and the likeness of two things dwelt upon at length. But this exploitation of similarity itself is a thing which no one with a spark of true poetry in him can tolerate.

Page 59

I need not explain that this opinion has dominated English minds ever since the days of Elizabeth, and before. The poet makes things, says Philip Sidney, "either bet-

ter than nature bringeth forth, or, quite a newe, formes such as neuer were in nature." According to Francis Bacon likewise, the great virtue of poetry is that it does not "buckle and bow" the mind to the real facts of experience. Endless quotations are possible to this same effect: that poetry is a means by which too delicate spirits can run away from the terms of existence. It is a parlor idea, and every great poet that ever lived belies it. Milton and Dante, indeed, are supposed to have made supernatural ventures into a realm of unreality, or at least a world of spirit, simply because they *said* that this was where they were going. It is clear enough to the eye of analysis, however, that in proportion as their imaginative passages are great, they are filled with the material colors of the real world. There may be such a thing as pure spirit, but a book of poems is the last place in which it will be found. It will be found in Euclid rather than Dante.

Page 65

The quotation is from Walt Whitman's "Passage to India."

Page 67

The Japanese translations are taken, for the most part, from a book by Basil Hall Chamberlain, called "Japanese Poetry."

Page 72

The quotations are from Walt Whitman's "The Answerer" and "Salut au Monde."

Page 76

This definition and the whole modern treatment of "figures of speech," is perhaps due to a misunderstanding of Aristotle's classifications. "Rhetoric" meant to Aristotle the forensic art, the art of convincing and per-

suading. This art was a sub-chapter of logic, in which metaphors (for he calls all these things metaphors) have no vital place. They are "ornaments" merely. Aristotle himself recognized, however vaguely, that their position in poetic writing is different, and he never intended his rhetoric for a general Bible.

### Page 77

This kind of choice is called "metonymy" when some adjunct or pervasive quality of a thing is named, "synecdoche" when a definite part. But if you substitute the word *experience* for *thing* in these definitions, the distinction between metonymy and synecdoche properly disappears.

In defining synecdoche as "naming a part for the whole," it is customary to add "or sometimes the whole for a part." But I think in every example which can be given of the latter, it will be found that the name of *the whole* either offers a more single and somehow apprehensible focus of attention, or stimulates the imagination by the very strangeness of its use, or else is not poetic at all, but merely a less specific way of talking than the reader expected.

Aristotle made the peculiar mistake of including this use of a general term instead of a specific, among his "metaphors." (Poetics, chap. XXI, 4). Transferring a name from genus to species, he calls it, and gives as an example from the Odyssey:

"Secure in yonder port my vessel stands."

"For to be moored," he says, "is a species of standing." I do not know what the associative flavors of the words are in Greek, but if the one is really by grammatical definition a species of the other, then there is no transfer of a word "out of its proper signification." There is simply general

instead of specific language, as when we say "an animal" instead of "a dog."

Perhaps it is mainly out of a persistent, and generally well-founded, reverence for Aristotle, that this secondary definition of synecdoche survives. There surely are cases when, for accidental reasons either in the word or the thing, it is more vivid to name the whole than the part. "The west warns us," appears to me more poetic than "The sunset warns us." But I think this, and other cases of the kind, are actually (when we substitute *experience* for *thing*) selections of a vivid part.

Page 78

"*Pleonasm*" and "*Tautology*" are two other so-called "figures" which find their explanation here. "Saying the same thing over again" is supposed to be a peculiar literary delight upon many occasions. But when this is not exact repetition, it is usually one of the manifestations of poetic choice—an experience being indicated in general first, and then the chosen attribute called forth.

Page 82

The quotations are from the Book of Psalms.

Page 87

Perhaps the intrinsic nature and motive of all poetic utterance is clearest proven in the spontaneous answer of one of these Indians when he was asked, "How do you make your songs?" "When I am herding my sheep," he said, "or away in the fields, and I see something that I like —then I sing about it." Another compiled a commentary upon his song, so that its "inner meaning" might be known to the hearer, and this is what he said: "My song is about butterflies flying over the cornfields and over the beans. One butterfly is running after the other like the hunt, and there are many."

Let us hear the song, for it is one of the few whose poetry is all within the perception of a person who has been civilized.

"Yellow butterflies,
Over the blossoming virgin corn,
With pollen-painted faces,
Chase one another in brilliant throng.

"Blue butterflies,
Over the blossoming virgin beans,
With pollen-painted faces,
Chase one another in brilliant streams.

"Over the blossoming corn,
Over the virgin corn,
Wild bees hum,
Over the blossoming beans,
Over the virgin beans,
Wild bees hum.

"Over your fields of growing corn,
All day shall hang the thunder-cloud;
Over your fields of growing corn,
All day shall come the rushing rain."

All these examples are taken from "The Indians' Book," by Natalie Curtis.

Page 88

The pleasure of attributing supremely poetic language to an occult inspiration, will set many romantic people who never wrote poetry, against this description of the poet's mind. But for my part I see no gain, even for intelligent romance, in imputing these qualities to the intuitive or subliminal mind. They are just the same things there, that they are in the deliberate mind. We cannot make a natural thing supernatural by showing that it is not expressly directed at every step by a self-conscious faculty. So

while we recognize that these gifts of the poet are often subconscious, we need not therefore hesitate to say that they are what they are. And to this we may add that if biography tells us anything, it tells us that the greatest poets and artists were in a high degree self-conscious and deliberate, as well as exalted, in their creative moments.

Page 90

The quotation is from Keats's "Endymion."

Page 92

This twofold function of rhythm can be more technically expressed if we remember that emotions are never *imaged;* they are "real" even when images arouse them. They are of the body. And a poetic rhythm, though its cruder effect is usually to lull us into that state where images grow clear, does also (I would almost say *afterward*) directly intensify the emotions that accompany those images. If this statement is unsatisfactory from a scientific stand-point, that is not, I think, because it idealizes or blurs the facts, but because science has in this direction no dominant hypothesis under which the facts can be arranged.

Page 96

It is perhaps necessary, in this place, to allude to the fact that the word "poetry" often means "metrical language," regardless of whether any genuine realization is conveyed by such language or not. The opposite of "poetry" in this sense is "straight copy." And since this distinction is valuable in its place, we need not dispute the definition. We are using the word poetry in one of its other senses which is for our purpose, and for the general purposes of life, more important, and we wish to show the historical and scientific relation of metrical language to poetry in this sense.

The dispute over what "poetry" means, as though one word always means and always must mean but one class of things, is so wearisome and (now that we understand the history of words) so full of academic folly, that I insert this note simply to ward off the suggestion of it.

Page 100

The quotation is from the Book of Genesis.

Page 103

The quotations of Homer are from Bryant's translation of the "Iliad."

Page 105

The quotations of Shakespeare are, for the most part, from "Coriolanus" or "King Lear."

Page 107

As a poet of the world, there is, I think, this failing in Shakespeare—and it is seen by Tolstoy—that he had a too special love of words. Often the experience which his lines convey is an experience of the high wonder of the birth and being of language rather than of things, and it is open only to persons of specialized perception in that direction. I can best show what I mean by calling attention to the entire transparency of the words in this passage from Shelley, how un-Shakespearian it is:

"The rocks are cloven, and through the purple night
I see cars drawn by rainbow-wingéd steeds
Which trample the dim winds: in each there stands
A wild-eyed charioteer urging their flight.
Some look behind, as fiends pursued them there,
And yet I see no shapes but the keen stars:
Others, with burning eyes, lean forth, and drink
With eager lips the wind of their own speed,

As if the thing they loved fled on before,
And now, even now, they clasped it. Their bright locks
Stream like a comet's flashing hair: they all
Sweep onward."

Here is motion, and motion rich with the technique of verbal realization, yet clear in a way that Shakespeare is not often clear, because he loved excessively the feeling of words in his mouth and mind.

"They drink with eager lips the wind of their own speed."

Page 107 (2)

The term "lyric poetry," as now used, has less than no scientific value. And the word "epic," when it does not express a judgment of value, means simply a long story told in poetry.

Page 109

The quotation is from Burns's poem "To a Mountain Daisy."

Page 110

The quotation is from a song in Tennyson's "Princess," quoted again in Chapter XII.

Page 113

The expression "word-painting" derives, I believe, from John Ruskin, but the idea that physical vision of imaginary things is the poetic faculty *par excellence*, is older than books. "A speaking picture" is Philip Sidney's expression.

The tribute of the eye surpasses that of all the other senses except touch, in giving us the sense of a presence. It is a matter of small moment if we *hear* a lady splashing in the bath at sunrise, but given the least retreating shade of her to our eyesight, and there is a great awakening!

It is a topic for myth and song. For such reasons we speak of all mental substance as though it were composed purely of visual memory. "Imagination" and even "idea" are visual words. And the definition of poetry as painting, is but a continuation of this way of speaking.

It is in truth a poetic name for poetry. It chooses one, and that an eminent one, of its qualities and compares it upon the basis of that to a material art. But poetry may as truly be compared to sculpture or to any other art that appeals to an external sense. The realizations of other artists are limited to certain of the senses, but the artist of imagination appeals to them all. Therefore, to call the poet "painter," is to speak poetically. Whereas to call the painter a "poet"—a realizer of things through form and color—is almost a scientific generalization.

In Caxton's "Book of Curtesye," I find this appreciation of "Galfreyde Chawcer," which expresses more truly than "word-painting" the characteristic of poetry which we distinguish in this chapter:

> "His langage was so fayr and pertynente
> It seemeth unto mannys herrynge
> Not only the worde but verely the Thynge."

## Page 117

The quotation is from the poem called "Walt Whitman."

## Page 120

Even where it appears, as so often in Wordsworth's poems, that exactly the opposite principle has been followed, the commonest of all names being chosen, I think that the poetic effect lies largely in the fact that, for persons who are accustomed to the ways of poetry, that very thing is a surprise. In somewhat the same way, an extreme prose word is often poetic in a passage of continuous poetry.

Page 121

The quotations are from a mediæval writer, from Shelley's "Skylark," and from the Rig-Veda.

Page 122

The quotation is from Robert Burns.

Page 123

All that we have of Sappho has been collected, with various English translations, by Henry Thornton Wharton, in a book called "Sappho."

Page 127

The quotation is a fragment of Shelley's.

Page 128

The quotation is from Shelley's "Adonais."

Page 131

The quotation is from the "Song of Solomon."

Page 133

The quotation is from Andrew Lang's translations of Theocritus.

Page 135

"When Lilacs Last in the Dooryard Bloomed" is Walt Whitman's poem upon the death of Abraham Lincoln.

Page 136

For any who may read my book studiously, I wish to explain that in this chapter I mean by "abstract ideas," not merely those indicated by terms which are abstract in the logical sense. I mean also those indicated by general terms when they are used, not to denote *some* individual

(a dog barked), but to denote *any* individual (a dog is a good friend). The abstraction to which I refer is psychological, not logical. It is the abstraction inherent in any "concept," regarded as a concept, or used for the purpose of exposition—used in any way except to name for the imagination an individual thing. This is what the word abstract signifies in its popular, as well as its psychological use, and, therefore, except for technical purposes, this note is superfluous.

Page 136 (2)

This way of apprehending poetry appears to be as ancient as any. "Apparent pictures of unapparent natures" is a Zoroastrian definition which sums up all the others.

Aristotle, in contrasting poetry with history, assumes that the *particulars* in poetry are but *instances* of a generalization.

Sidney revives this opinion, and pleases his heart with the idea that the aim of all poetry is to *instruct* by means of pictures.

Emerson shows the same tendency. "I am a poet," he says, "in the sense of a perceiver and dear lover of the harmonies that are in the soul and in matter, and *especially of the correspondences between these and those*."

It was by this road that I arrived at the present analysis of poetry. I published in the *North American Review* for March, 1908, an article on "The Poet's Mind," which proposed to distinguish poetry from practical language, but did so only in so far as each is employed in the expression of abstract ideas.

Hudson Maxim has written a book in which he defines poetry in much the same way. His book has a grand title, "The Science of Poetry, and the Philosophy of Language," and this, as well as its contents, bears me out a little in my belief that these definitions are, like the

others, partial definitions, expressions of taste upon the part of excessively intellectual people. The true generalization does not contradict, but includes them.

Page 137

"The butterfly sleeps on the village bell" is a Japanese poem, like those quoted in Chapter VI.

Page 137 (2)

The quotation is from Isaiah.

Page 138

The quotation is from Kant's "Critique of Pure Reason."

Page 140

"The deep truth is imageless."—Something of this kind must have been meant by Hegel in his assertion that while poetry is the highest of the arts, "the prose of thought" is one thing higher.

That such a thing as "imageless thought" exists is maintained by very few psychologists to-day. We may say, I think, that, no matter how "pure" one's reason may be, its procedure is dependent in some measure upon fragments of imagery or sensation.

Page 148

The quotation is from Wordsworth's ode on "Intimations of Immortality."

Page 150

The quotation is from Emerson.

Page 151

The quotation is from Fitzgerald's translation of "The Rubáiyát" of Omar Khayyám.

Many of the Japanese Hokku are poems of this kind, there being some idea suggested to the initiated, even though the words appear to us purely pictorial. This is true, I believe, of two or three of those quoted in chapter VI. But it is not true of all, and is not essential to their being poems.

Page 155

The quotation is from Tennyson's "Morte d'Arthur."

Page 156

This decline into a passion for the technique of poetry as an end in itself, is of course always imminent, when people make a life business of composing it. Browning was almost more infatuated with rhyme, it would appear, than with his very highest imaginations, for he so frequently sacrificed the latter to the former.

A similar, although more intellectual, decadence, is the passion for singularity and similarity as ends in themselves. The aim of a poetic choice or comparison here ceases to be the enhancement of an experience, and it becomes merely an exploitation of intellectual ingenuity.

Page 157

The quotation is from Tennyson's "The Lotos Eaters."

Page 157 (2)

Poe has himself given an account of his mood and manner of creating, which supports this judgment. And he too wrote upon the science, or "rationale," of verse, and even made a definition of all poetry as "a pleasurable idea accompanied by music."

Page 157 (3)

The quotation is from Poe's "The Sleeper."

Page 162

Another reason why it is unfortunate to quote those immemorial lines as examples of poetry, is that they are not even illuminating examples of onomatopœia. Their imitation is too obvious and extraordinary. But onomatopœia, in millions of subtle forms, is pervasive in poetry. It is a principle that relates to far other matters than the naming of bees, or a buzz-saw. It is the principle of that poetic quality which we found native to all rapid narrative—a similarity in consecutiveness between the words and the events. It is the principle of infinite indescribable appropriatenesses in language—things that science can but indicate in their variety and leave to unconscious discovery by those whose sensibilities are fine.

That line of Keats, "Lucent syrops tinct with cinnamon," can show that the principle applies to other organs than the ear. *Tinct* is a most delicate imitation of the act of tasting. It is more than that. *Wolfish* again is a poetic word through muscular imitation of a snarl. And "*unflesh your teeth*" is still more so, because it does exactly what it says. But these also are obvious, compared, for instance, to the appropriateness of the dark sound of the word *war* to the thing it conceives, or the thick shock of the word *blood*. It is difficult to distinguish what quality pertains to a word through its previous uses, and what through its purely sensible nature.—*Violet* is so different from *violent!* But certainly some of this quality is purely vocal. Words do have their sensible nature; it is definite; and to those gifted or trained in such perceptions, it may become a strong enhancement of the imagination of things.

If one wished to write a science of these values, he would have to recognize not only similarities in the different senses (sound and sight and motion) involved in word perception, but also similarities between one sense and another (as sound and color in the word *gray*), and between sensations and ideas, or emotions. He would have also to

recognize a second principle, besides onomatopœia. For words acquire value through association, not with other things only, but with the names of other things. *Bludgeon*, for instance, is a poetic word because it has blood on it, as well as a good heavy smash of its own. On the other hand, *spectre* and *phantom* and *ghost* are poetic words exactly because they have no associates. They are unique words, naming the unique apparition. Milton speaks of the army of the pigmies as small *infantry*, and the critics accuse him of a pun. But doubtless he chose the word, as he would any other, entirely unconscious of the source of its appropriate flavor. No one has ever studied to classify these sources, but I believe the associative relations among words and syllables themselves would be found almost as important in such a classification as onomatopœia.

Page 162 (2)

The quotation is from that song in Tennyson's "Princess" called "Come Down, O Maid."

Page 165

The sonnet is by Christina Rossetti.

Page 166

The quotation is from Keats's "La Belle Dame Sans Merci."

Page 175

This will be true about the poetry of books only if one is entirely free from cultural dogmas about what books he "ought to" enjoy, free to make his own arbitrary choices, free to reject all books when the poetry of his own soul is at its highest.

Page 178

That these intervals are not mathematically equal in the modern reading of poetry, has been established by mechanical experiment. An approximation to equality is nevertheless what gives them their rhythmic character, and the act of perception may somehow equalize them in their nervous, as it does in their psychic, effect.

Page 178 (2)

As a result of this attitude to the line rhythm, at least one so-called "law of prosody" has entirely dominated English poets, and often, I think, to their misfortune. It is the law about left-over syllables at the end, or beginning, of a line in blank verse. Suppose the division between two lines properly falls in the middle of a word, or of an indivisible phrase, as in this example:

"To hím the wáll
That súnders ghósts and shádow-cásting mén
Becáme a crýstal, ánd he sáw them thróugh it."

Prosodists diagnose that contrarious syllable *it*, which properly belongs to the next line, as a sort of abnormal excrescence upon the old line, call this by the terrifying name of acatalectic (or catalectic, or hypercatalectic—one never remembers which) and require that the next line shall begin all fresh with another unaccented syllable. Thus:

"Becáme a crýstal ánd he sáw them thróúgh it
And heárd their vóíces tálk behínd the wáll."

That is, they require that we sacrifice the flow of the accent rhythm, in order to preserve the integrity of the lines upon the page. It is, perhaps, foolish for them to "require" anything, but I think it would be less foolish to require that we cut off the real excrescence, which is the syllable *and*, allowing the syllable *it*, which is the first

syllable of the new line, to remain, if it must, upon the end of the old. Thus:

> "To hím the wáll
> That súnders ghósts and shádow-cásting mén
> Becáme a crýstal, ánd he sáw them thróúgh it,
> Heárd their voíces tálk behínd the wáll."

I think so, because the visible rhythm, although more obvious, is not so important as the audible rhythm. I believe that one who composed blank verse in natural freedom from the idea of a printed page—while he might anywhere introduce extra syllables for his pleasure or convenience—would usually overcome this technical difficulty by sacrificing the regularity of both lines rather than by sacrificing the regular recurrence of his accent.

I have taken the example from Tennyson (*Vivien* in "The Idylls of the King"), because he is famous for the studied perfection of his rhythm, but in this matter he follows a pattern which has been accepted, so far as I know, by every English composer of blank verse.

## Page 180

In ancient Greek and Latin poetry the rhythm within the line was apparently not a product of natural accent, but depended upon the reader's "bringing it out," just as the line rhythm did. I believe that it was brought out, however (when instrumental music or dance-gesture was absent), by means of some rhythmic accent, and that the poet's effort was to combine syllables easy and difficult of enunciation in such an order as to lend themselves well to that accent. It is certain, at least, that poets of any worth were not much occupied with those artificial "rules of quantity," which their learned commentators have passed down to us; and it is certain that there was no finer "discrimination of time intervals" then, than there is now.

Poetry was a good deal the same, but scholars were making up a different fairy-tale about it.

Page 181

The quotation is from Sidney Lanier's "Song of the Chattahoochee."

Page 181 (2)

Rhyme is employed in the line, "I hurry amain to reach the plain," to reduplicate the rhythm still again—to bring out, that is, a half-line rhythm within the others.

Page 182

The quotations are from Dante Gabriel Rossetti's "Jenny"; Shelley's "To Night"; Burns's "To a Mouse," and "The Banks o' Doon."

Page 183

Notice that this regular alternation produces a third reduplication of the wave series. A fourth is produced by separating equal groups of lines into stanzas. Stanzas are usually so long, however, that they can only be perceived in retrospection, and are then not truly rhythmical, but a part of the formal attractiveness of poems.

Page 185

The alternation of lines of different length is a fifth way of reduplicating the wave series. And the alternation of feet of different length is a sixth. The latter is not common in English poetry, occurring so far as I know only in imitations of ancient unrhymed song, but its effect is both strong and unique. I quote an example from Swinburne's "Sapphics."

"Then the Muses, *stricken at* heart, were silent;
Yea the gods waxed *pale; such a* song was that song.
All reluctant *all with a* fresh repulsion,
*Fled from be*fore her.

"All withdrew long *since, and the* land was barren,
Full of fruitless *women and* music only.
Now perchance, when *winds are* assuaged at sunset,
*Lulled at the* dewfall,

"By the gray sea-side, unassuaged, unheard of,
Unbeloved, unseen in the ebb of twilight,
Ghosts of outcast women return lamenting,
Purged not in Lethe.

"Clothed about with flame and with tears, and singing
Songs that move the heart of the shaken heaven,
Songs that break the heart of the earth with pity,
Hearing, to hear them."

Page 186

For the person who sees it on the page, or reads it in a certain way, a similarity of *nature* and *position* remains, even when the length of lines is varied. A broad suggestion of rhythmic recurrence is retained in this way even in Walt Whitman's poetry.

Page 186 (2)

So soon as, and so far as, the poem itself becomes an object of realization, and the elements of writing and utterance are developed in variety for their own sake, much more than this may be said of rhythmical speech. Only it will all be a pointing out of various specific characteristics; it will not be a general theory of poetic rhythm.

An infinite number of good things have already been said upon this subject. But they have not recognized themselves to be a pointing out of new varieties and ways in which verse has attracted a reader; they have taken them-

selves each to be an exclusively true general theory of English rhythm. And so prosody has been vitiated and rendered ridiculous, just as at some time every science has, by the superstitious assumption that a single, eternal, and futile, and absolute truth exists in answer to every question that may arise.

Page 194

The quotation is from George Chapman.

Page 195

The quotation is from Robert Browning's "Saul."

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